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GOD IS LOVE

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A JOURNAL FOR SOCIO-RELIGIOUS RESEARCH

God is Love

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Editorial

Pope Benedict XVI issued his first encyclical letter entitled *Deus Caritas Est* (God is love) on 25 December 2005. This is the first time when the theme of love is treated directly and extensively in an encyclical. It is an extended theological commentary on the biblical affirmation, 'God is love' found in I Jn 4: 8, 16. Remarkably different from the encyclicals of the previous Pontificate, *Deus Caritas Est* contains few references to past papal pronouncements, and only passing reference to John Paul II. It reflects a strong biblical vision, with very judicious reference to the early church fathers. The style of this document is precise and Christocentric. This is in sharp contrast to the encyclicals of John Paul II, which were rather personalistic and discursive, and hence described by his critics as eclectic and wandering.

In the wake of numerous theological discussions following *Deus Caritas Est*, this issue of *Jeevadhara* studies a few aspects of the theme of love. This issue primarily means to extrapolate some of the concerns and claims raised by *Deus Caritas Est*. Indirectly this attempt may serve as a loose commentary on the papal text. Obviously these essays, except the first one, do not make a direct study on the encyclical of Benedict XVI.

Many a time love is reduced to a sentimental feeling. In addition to its emotional content, love is an uninterrupted response. Quite insightfully Shakespeare writes: "Love is not love/ Which alters when alteration finds/ Or bends with remover to remove." ("Sonnet 116," 2-4). There have been deep reflections on love in theology as well. Attempts have been made to explain Christian mysteries and categories in terms of love. For instance, the source of all reality, according to Augustine, is *vera caritas* and *cara veritas* — true love and lovable

truth (*De Trinitate* IV, *Prooemium*, line 39). Karl Barth in his *Ethics* (p. 189) suggests, 'the friend is a model of the *neighbor*.' Hans Urs von Balthasar, for another example, once said, love is not a fine feeling but the "light of being". This remark becomes striking once we recognize that all love concerns relationships, either actual or potential. Any church which is serious about relationships cannot overlook the meaning and demands of love from a theological point of view. For a community founded on the love of God in its deepest sense, theological grasp of love becomes imperative. This insight forms the major rationale of this issue of *Jeevadhara*.

The first essay by Shaji Mundaplackal briefly introduces the encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*. It is to expose the main themes of this document to those who are not directly familiar with the text. In this exposition we notice that the entire discussion of the encyclical is firmly rooted in the history of human reflection on the nature of love. The pope highlights what is distinctive in the Christian intellectual tradition. He is eager to rebut Nietzsche's claim that the Christian view of eros drained the blood out of human passion and the quest for transcendence.

All Christians and perhaps many non-Christians are familiar with the basic tenet of the New Testament that God is love. It sounds apparently simple and clear. For we presume that we know what love is. The biblical source of the affirmation is 1 Jn 4: 8, 16. It is a rich and deep statement of Christian revelation. Commenting on this text St. Augustine said: "the same brotherly love (the brotherly love with which we love one another) does not only come from God, but is God... when we love our brother with love, we are loving through God"—*Cum ergo de dilectione diligimus fratrem, de Deo diligimus fratrem* (*De Trinitate* bk VI, VIII, 12). Jacob Chanikuzhy explains the biblical meaning and theological scope of the apparently simple affirmation, namely, God is love.

The last half of the encyclical tries to make the connections between love as expressed in *kerygma* (witness), *leitourgia* (worship), and *diakonia* (service)—the three dimensions of the church's life and mission. Here the pope is at pains to challenge the

separation, common also among many Christians, of charity and justice. He argues that the proposal that justice must replace charity is fundamentally false. In the wake of this papal teaching Hormis Mynatty critically examines the relation between charity and justice. He studies the contentions of *Deus Caritas Est* in comparison with the social encyclical tradition of the church.

Love can be commanded because it has been first given. This is very much true in the context of the social dimension of charity and the Eucharist. Pope Benedict's encyclical sufficiently explains the significance of the social ministry of the church, especially in terms of charity. Here, however, Mathew Paikada points out a clear deviation of the encyclical from the social encyclicals of his predecessors, both with regard to the approach and content. The Pope teaches that diaconia is 'part of the fundamental structure of the church' and at the same time he reminds that 'diaconia' should not become 'a means to achieve other ends'. Here he might be making reference to the temptation to use diaconia as an enticement for increasing church membership. The church was for a long time, hesitant and reluctant to face the challenges raised by enlightenment and the new social sciences. She was allotting specific sphere for socio-political-economic developments in the name of legitimate autonomy, but at the same time over concerned with keeping aloof from the critique of her own structures and dogmatic teachings. The concern of the church and the concern of the society went on parallel lines without fruitful critical interaction. Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul II tried to interact with the world to be really the light of the world and salt of the earth. Mathew Paikada makes a theological appraisal of this magisterial attempt.

There is a strong emotional content in love. But emotions have been thought to be irrational by many. Even Aristotle, one of the few friends of passion in the history of philosophy, insisted that only states of character, not passions can be counted as virtues. This general aversion to emotions is reflected also in the devaluation of eros, counting it as passionate desire. However, though not very common, there have been instances of giving due respect to eros in Christian

thought. Following the attempt of *Deus Caritas est* to redeem the meaning and dignity of eros, Mathew Illathuparampil makes a multifaceted defence of eros in Christian theology and praxis.

— Instead of traditional allegorical interpretation, Davis Thekkekara makes a literal reading of “Song of Songs”, the love poem of the Old Testament. It is a unique book of the bible where love is celebrated for its own sake. The fact that *Deus Caritas est* also refers to this work demands a theological appreciation of Song of Songs”, in the context of Old Testament theology.

Should an extended discussion on the various dimensions of love make us more loving? Not necessarily. But a theological discourse on love shall make the demands of love more obvious and compelling. It is not a minor feat from the perspective of Christian praxis.

Mathew Illathuparampil

Deus Caritas Est: An Overview

Shaji Mundaplackal

This essay means primarily to serve two things: first, a short exposition of what *Deus Caritas Est* says. Secondly, to give an account on how the Christian vision of love is distinct from other perceptions of love. The author, Dr. Shaji Mundaplackal who is a visiting professor at Good Shepherd Major Seminary Kunnoth, outlines the major challenges that this encyclical puts forward in its interpretation of love. This essay shall prepare the readers to grapple with the themes of others essays in this issue.

In the encyclical letter *Deus Caritas Est*, the Holy Father pope Benedict XVI attempts to restore a proper understanding of love, holding that healthy human love derives from, and reflects, God's love for humankind. The recognition that God is love, he says, also governs the Christian understanding of human beings and their purpose in life. The document condemns all efforts to reduce human love to a merely physical attraction. In this encyclical the pope bring home the message of love at a time when our world needs it most.¹ Pope Benedict XVI invites us to reflect on the truth which is the foundation of our faith: God who is love, loves us with an immeasurable love, and invites us to share that love.

What is striking about the encyclical is that it demonstrates the "newness" of the biblical notion of love, rooted in God's revelation of his love. As such, it does not deny or negate the human love (*eros*) but rather elevates and purifies it in a manner consistent with authentic human dignity. This document argues that *eros* was fully revealed and en-fleshed in Jesus Christ.

1 Thomas D 'sa, "Caritas: Christian Love in Action: A Pastoral Dimension," *Word and Worship* 39/3 (2006) 184.

In acknowledging the centrality of love, Christian faith has retained the core of Israel's faith, while at the same time giving it new depth and breadth. Jesus united into a single precept this commandment of love for God and the commandment of love for neighbor found in the *Book of Leviticus*: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (19:18; Mk 12:29-31). Since God has first loved us (1 Jn 4:10), love is now no longer a mere "command;" it is the response to the gift of love with which God draws near to us. The pope speaks of the love which God lavishes upon us and which we in turn must share with others. He wants to point out to the believers and to the whole world, God as the source of authentic love. Only God's love can renew the human heart, and only if he heals the heart of paralyzed humanity can it get up and walk. The love of God is the true force that renews the world.

This article means to offer a brief overview of the encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* (hereafter abbreviated as DCE). This attempt would enable us to understand the claims and concerns of the pope.²

DCE is composed of two major parts, the first part, which is more speculative, speaks about the essential facts concerning the love which God mysteriously and gratuitously offers to human beings, together with the intrinsic link between that love and the reality of human love.³ This is a meditation on the fundamental biblical affirmation, "God is love". The second part is more concrete, which is an examination of how Christian charity affects human society. Furthermore, he speaks about the relation between charity and justice.

I: The Unity of Love in Creation and in Salvation History

1. "Eros" and "Agape": Difference and unity

Benedict XVI illustrates that "love". is one of the most commonly used and misused words, to which we attach quite different meanings. We know how easily, often and lightly we use the word "love" on a

2 For further reading on various aspects of *Deus Caritas Est*, *Communio* 33/3 (Fall 2006).

3 In this context it is good to recall that God has been explained by Hans Urs von Balthasar as an event of love. For further reading Antonio López, "Eternal Happening: God as an event of Love," *Communio* 32/2 (Summer 2005) 214-245.

daily basis. He explains, referring to the ancient Greek understanding, that there are three types of love relative to the human experience: *eros*, that love between man and woman which is neither planned nor willed, but somehow imposes itself upon human beings; *philia*, the love of friendship; and *agape*, the New Testament vision, the Christian understanding of love (DCE 3).

From the overly-sensual perspective of modern times, the Christian understanding of love has come under severe attack. There is a desire to have the love known as *eros* without the profound spiritual love known as *agape*. The latter is the central ethical motive of Judeo-Christian faith, but it is not specifically defined in the New Testament or Old Testament. But from the whole context of the Scripture it means in relation to God, the reverence, the trust and obedience on the part of the people; and in relation to creation, to will their well-being.⁴ The central point is that the love which the Greeks called *eros* has a possessive nature that requires the possession of the beloved by the lover. This erotic love, if not purified, can seek to dominate the other and ends up reducing the other to a mere object of desire. The task is not to eliminate *eros*, which is good in itself, but to complement and complete it with another type of love, for which the Greek New Testament uses the word *agape*. *Agape*, the pope explains, is self-sacrificing love, in which the lover offers himself for the good of the beloved. The deepest revelation of God's love is precisely this *agape*, in which Jesus on the cross lays down his life for those he loves. This is the nature of God's love for us. He wishes to possess us (*eros*), but at the same time is willing to sacrifice all for us (*agape*). Human love — whether between friends, neighbors, or in the closest image of God's love, marriage — is called to be this kind of self-giving, sacrificial love.

DCE confronts and rejects philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche's argument that "Christianity had poisoned *eros*", explaining that physical love between a man and woman (*eros*) merges into concern and care for the other (*agape*) in Christian marital love. This document does not destroy or negate *eros*, the natural instinct in human nature, but it tries to place it in a different context and draws it into the fullness of love as expressed in *agape*. The validity of *eros* is not

4 H.H. Barnette, *Exploring Medical Ethics*, 1982, 22-23.

denied, but is considered constructive only when it is linked with *agape*. Pope Benedict goes on to write that Christian love inevitably includes concern for the poor. This concern is shown in a commitment to justice in the political order — as reflected in his social teachings of the church— and in concrete works of charity to help those in need. In Christ we encounter God's completely generous love (*agape*) and are invited to love our neighbor with that same sort of love. Thus the command to love God and neighbor is really a single command! In order to love our neighbor, we “must constantly drink anew from the original source, which is Jesus Christ, from whose pierced heart flow, the love of God” (DCE 7).

2. The newness of the biblical faith

The Bible presents the reality of love in all its novelty. The Old Testament is rich in imagery of the intimate love, described in nuptial terms, which God bears for His People. Images from the prophets, such as Hosea and Ezekiel, and the poetry of the Song of Songs particularly reflect this mystery of God's love in His revelation to the People of Israel. The history of the love relationship between God and Israel consists at the deepest level, in the fact that he gives her the Torah. It is not seen as an obstacle to freedom, but as a help to open Israel's eyes to true nature of the human person in her/his frailty and possibilities. The observance of the Torah will lead Israel to a true humanism, which understands the human person as one who is loved by God (DCE 9). The Pope notes as well that God's choice of Israel out of all the nations upon the earth and the love which He lavishes upon His People is done with a view to the healing of the entire human race.

3. Jesus Christ – the incarnate love of God

The New Testament introduces in human history the fullness of God's Revelation in Jesus Christ, who gives flesh and blood to the mystery of God's love. In Jesus, the incarnated God unites with each human and “we enter into the very dynamic of his self-giving” (DCE 13). The incarnation of God in Jesus is not just “giving,” but “self-giving.” Christ draws us to him by giving himself. Since then the only way to unite is through self-giving. “This divine activity now takes on dramatic form when, in Jesus Christ, it is God himself who goes in search of the ‘lost sheep’, a suffering and lost humanity.” The life,

the miracles, teachings and parables of Christ all reveal the truth that God is love (1 Jn 4:8). The death of Christ on the Cross reveals the mystery of the length and depth to which God is willing to go to save the human race. Pope Benedict XVI explains this as the “turning of God against himself in which, he gives himself in order to raise man up and save him”. This is what the Pope describes as “love in its most radical form” (DCE 12).

From the mystery of the Crucified Christ we are drawn into the mystery of the Eucharist, in which Christ perpetuates the saving act. Here God becomes flesh among us who draws us all to himself. The Body and Blood of Christ enable us to be intimately united with Him and also united with each other. Through the Eucharist, “God’s own agape in flesh and blood comes to us in order to continue his work in us and through us” (DCE 14).

4. Love of God and love of neighbor

The glance of Christian love extends beyond Israel, beyond the Church, beyond husband and wife. It embraces the entire humanity, the one that has already been redeemed and it reaches each and every single person and, at the same time, the entire humanity. “Love of God and love of neighbor,” says the Holy Father, are connected: “If I have no contact whatsoever with God in my life, then I cannot see in the other anything more than the other, and I am incapable of seeing in him the image of God. But if in my life I fail completely to heed others, solely out of a desire to be ‘devout’ and to perform my ‘religious duties,’ then my relationship with God will also grow arid” (DCE 18).

There is an intrinsic relation between love of God and love of neighbor. The latter is given as demand and a path to the other. The parable of the Good Samaritan offers two particularly important clarifications. Until that time, the concept of ‘neighbor’ was understood as referring essentially to one’s countrymen and to foreigners who had settled in the land of Israel; in other words, to the closely knit community of a single country or people. “This limit is now abolished. Anyone who needs me, and whom I can help, is my neighbor. The concept of ‘neighbor’ is now universalized, yet it remains concrete. Despite being extended to all humankind, it is not reduced to a generic, abstract and undemanding expression of love, but calls

for my own practical commitment here and now" (DCE 15). Love is not just a passing sentiment. It engages our will, our intellect. It demands that we make it an act of our will which accepts God's will. With these observations, Benedict devotes the second part of DCE to the Church's obligation to do charitable work. The Pope holds up Mother Teresa of Calcutta as a model to follow because she insisted all her charitable work was an overflow of her love for Jesus. She loved the unlovely because she loved Jesus, and he loved them.

II : *Caritas* : The Practice of Love by the Church as a "Community of Love"

This pivotal message of DCE is the foundation of our living together. In fact, it "constitutes us", it "calls us to a commitment" and extends the bonds of love to the utmost borders of the earth. Here — in the love of God — is where the bonds that unite people beyond their many differences find their foundation and an open perspective to embrace and follow. The second part of the encyclical underlines how "the totally personal act" of *agape* cannot remain something "merely individual," but must on the contrary "become an essential act of the Church as community." An institutional form is also needed that expresses itself in the communal action of the Church. This communal action is more than "a form of social assistance . . . superimposed by accident on the reality of the Church, an initiative that others could also take." In its communication of love of neighbor, the Church's charitable activity must "in a certain way make the living God visible." Pope Benedict shows how the Church must live the love she professes by being a community of life and love and by organized works of charity. The Holy Father reminds us that organized charity was considered an essential part, not an optional activity, of the Church's life from the very beginning. He demonstrates the unbreakable unity of proclaiming the Word of God, celebrating the sacraments, and exercising the ministry of charity. This unity gives rise to the distinctiveness of our Catholic charitable activity around the world as well as to our duty to work for a more just society.

In DCE the communitarian value of God's love is largely present. This encyclical is not directly a social encyclical, but when it grounds the human community and solidarity in the love of God, it repositions

in their right Christian context all the aspects of social life, the same constitution of society and the active solidarity among human beings.

1. The Church's charitable activity as a manifestation of the Trinitarian love

The encyclical invites the faithful to "the formation of heart". Which must help our hearts beat with and for our fellow beings beyond cultural, ethnic, religious divisions and discriminations. Charity moves from God's heart to the heart of Jesus Christ, and through his spirit across the world. This love is born from the encounter with Christ in faith.

Participation in the love of God, particularly in the Holy Eucharist, leads us to charitable activity. Our encounter with Jesus in the Eucharist transforms us to become conscious of the new self in spirit and truth. Pope Benedict XVI refers to the Church's charitable activity as a "manifestation of Trinitarian love", borrowing the concept from Saint Augustine: "If you see charity, you see the Trinity" (DCE 19).

2. Charity as a responsibility of the Church

From the earliest days of the Church, it has been recognized that each member of the Church is bound to love of one's neighbor. Charity within the community is also a collective responsibility of the entire Church. The pope clearly says that there is no compromise in the image of the Church as a community of love. "Love thus needs to be organized if it is to be an ordered service to the community" (DCE 20). The history of the Church traces the early development of charity as organized within the community. The Acts of the Apostles, the letters of Saint Paul, the accounts of early witnesses like Justin the Martyr or saint Lawrence of Rome indicate the significance of the practice of charity in the practice of the faith. This "constitutive relevance" of the love of neighbor in the Church was manifest from the beginning, for example, in the early believers' common possession of goods (Acts 2:44-5).

During the growth of the Church, it put this fundamental ecclesial principle into practice by the establishing the diaconal office (Acts 6:5-6). A group of seven persons was entrusted with the daily distribution of provisions to widows and the like. The Pope points out that these persons were not to carry out this task in a purely technical manner. On the contrary, they were to be men "full of the Spirit and

wisdom" (Acts 6:1-6). Pope Benedict XVI discusses several examples of how, in the course of Church history, this charitable service is seen as essential to her "ministry of the sacraments and the preaching of the Gospel" (DCE 21). "The Church cannot neglect the service of charity any more than she can neglect the Sacraments and the Word" (DCE 22).

For the Church, charity is not a kind of welfare activity... but is part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being. True love is expressed in acts that exclude no one (LK10:31). The foregoing considerations point toward two essential facts: first, "[t]he Church's deepest nature is expressed in her threefold responsibility: of proclaiming the Word of God, celebrating the sacraments and exercising the ministry of charity. These duties presuppose each other and are inseparable." Second, "[t]he Church is God's family in the world. In this family no one ought to go without the necessities of life. Yet at the same time *caritas-agape* extends beyond the frontiers of the Church" (DCE 25).

3. Justice and Charity

In the section of the encyclical entitled "Justice and Charity," Pope Benedict XVI traces the intellectual roots of the notion of charity. The pope begins his discussion of this issue by noting the objection that has emerged since the 19th century with respect to the Church's charitable activity "Since the nineteenth century, an objection has been raised to the Church's charitable activity, subsequently developed with particular insistence by Marxism: the poor, it is claimed, do not need charity but justice. Works of charity are in effect a way for the rich to shirk their obligation to work for justice and a means for soothing their consciences, while preserving their own status and robbing the poor of their rights. Instead of contributing through individual works of charity to maintaining the status quo, we need to build a just social order in which all will receive their share of the world's goods and no longer have to depend on charity." The Pope acknowledges that there is some truth to this argument but "also much that is mistaken." He emphasizes that "the pursuit of justice must be a fundamental norm of the state and that the aim of a just social order is to guarantee to each person, according to the principle of subsidiarity, his share of the community's goods" (DCE 26).

During the last two centuries, the teachings of the Church on issues of justice toward the poor, the neglected and the laborer have come into greater attention. Popes beginning with Leo XIII (RN , 1891), and followed by Pius XI (QA , 1931), and then later by John XXIII (MM, 1961), Paul VI (PP , 1967), and the trilogy of social encyclicals by John Paul II (LE , 1981; SRS , 1987; and CA , 1991) have enriched the Church's wealth of social doctrine while reminding the society and the State of the obligation to attend to the needs of all people, particularly the poor. The encyclical entails that the Church has to cooperate and promote all the secular movements which endeavor to establish social justice. The Church encourages politics for the creation of a just society. For, "a just society must be the achievement of politics, not of the Church. Yet the promotion of justice through efforts to bring about openness of mind and will to the demands of the common good is something which concerns the Church deeply" (DCE 28).

4. Multiple structures of charitable service in contemporary society

The Pope insists that love of neighbor, expressed in works of charity that embody a personal responsibility to the "other," cannot be left over to government agencies. Those agencies have their due place, but we fail the test of our own humanity, if charitable activities are not part of our lives. Paying the taxes to support governmental social services alone does not fulfill the obligation of love-of-neighbor however we conceive the source of that obligation.

5. The distinctiveness of the Church's charitable activity

Though charitable works remain an integral component of the Church's mission, Church's charitable activity is distinctive. In fulfillment of the works of mercy outlined by Christ Himself, the Church feeds the hungry, clothes the naked, cares for the sick, visits the imprisoned, etc. It is essential for the charitable offices of the Church on different levels to provide resources and trained personnel to address these needs. Christians who engage in social work need to be professionally competent, and this generally implies civil training that is not a prerogative of Christians. Yet, beyond the aspect of professional training, the Pope notes: "these charity workers need a 'formation of the heart.' They need to be led to that encounter with

God in Christ which awakens their love and opens their spirits to others.” Furthermore, the Church’s charitable activity must be independent of parties and ideologies. Rather, in imitation of the Good Samaritan what we need is “a heart which sees where love is needed and acts accordingly.

It is from within this ever-present dynamism for love and for encounter with the living God in Christ and his Church that the lay faithful are to carry out their proper mission of ethical formation, and of purifying reason and of being ready to act in the pursuit of social justice. The very nature of this love itself precludes “what is nowadays considered proselytism.” Christians living this love will “never seek to impose the Church’s faith upon others.”

6. Those responsible for the Church’s charitable activity

Pope Benedict XVI also indicates that the ministry of charity must be a priority for the Bishops, who are the successors of the Apostles. The Holy Father mentions that The Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops explains “the duty of charity as a responsibility incumbent upon the whole Church and upon each Bishop in his Diocese, and it is emphasized that the exercise of charity is an action of the Church as such, and that, like the ministry of Word and Sacrament, it too has been an essential part of her mission from the very beginning” (DCE 32). The faithful offer to God their service to the extent that they are able. “To do all we can with what strength we have, however, is the task which keeps the good servant of Jesus Christ always at work: ‘The love of Christ urges us on’ (2 Cor. 5:14)” (DCE 35). It is through prayer that we have the strength to persevere in the love of God and service of neighbor.

This part of the encyclical can be outlined as a profile to those who collaborate with Christian community’s ministry of charity. Here the pope recalls that the main motivation for charitable activity must always be the love of Christ; that charity is more than mere activity and implies the gift of self; that this gift must be humble, free of any superiority, and that its power derives from prayer.

Conclusion

The Holy Father concludes his encyclical with reflections on the saints whose outstanding and heroic charity has left its mark on history. Saint Martin of Tours, Saint Anthony the Abbot, Saint Francis of

Assisi, Saint Ignatius of Loyola, Saint John of God, Saint Camillus de Lellis, Saint Vincent de Paul, Saint Louise de Marillac, Saint John Bosco and Mother Teresa of Calcutta form part of the litany of heroes who have left a legacy of charity for the faithful to take up. "In the saints," writes Pope Benedict XVI, "one thing becomes clear: those who draw near to God do not withdraw from men, but rather become truly close to them" (DCE 42). This is most clearly seen in Mary, who at the foot of the Cross became the Mother of all believers. Men and women of every time and place have had recourse to Mary, who pours forth abundantly love and grace from the depths of her heart. "Mary, Virgin and Mother, shows us what love is and whence it draws its origin and its constantly renewed power."

Pope Benedict XVI in the encyclical DCE offers us plenty of challenges in our context. By and large the Encyclical's content is not the pope's exclusively personal theological view. It is rather a synthesis of the contemporary church's theology of love. The encyclical's accent is on the positive Christian vision: "Love of neighbor is a path that leads to encounter with God, and closing our eyes to the neighbor also blinds us to God." Some early interpretations have stressed the discontinuities between natural human loves (*eros* and *philia*) and self-giving Christian love (*agape*). But Pope Benedict, like St. Augustine, sees them all as part of one divine plan, and he regards erotic love and the love of friendship as sinful only when they are not acted upon in light of the larger, and God's completely generous love called *agape*.

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John and Jonah: Defining and Describing God's Love

Jacob Chanikuzhy

John the evangelist affirms that God is love. But what does it mean? How shall we define or describe God's love? Dr. Jacob Chanikuzhy, who teaches the Bible at Good Shepherd Major Seminary Kunnoth, addresses these questions. Making a brief exegetical reading of St. John, he brings out the newness of the love commandment given by Jesus. *Hesed* is one of the terms in the OT that expresses the notion of God's love. Exploring the meaning of this term, especially in view of the story of Jonah, the author describes the rich implications of God's love.

Introduction

Dove stands for innocence in the Gospel of Matthew (Mt 10,16). In the OT, Israel is called dove not in the sense of innocence but in the sense of senselessness: "Ephraim has become like a dove, silly and without sense" (Hos 7,11). Among the books in the OT, one in the prophetic section is named, pseudonymously of course, after the prophet Jonah. Literally Jonah means dove. What does it say about prophet Jonah? Is he a symbol of innocence or senselessness or of both?

John attempts a definition of God in one of his letters. Thus, in his first letter he affirms, "God is love" (1 Jn 4,8). Jonah, however is an attempt to describe the love of God and what the book narrates is a story of divine way of loving. The purpose of this article is to highlight certain aspects of the concept of love as it is envisaged by these authors and to spell out a few of its implications.

God is Love: Johannine Presentation of God's Love

That Jesus revealed God as our Father is no point of contention. Given the deep rooted trust of Christians in God's love, it is interesting to note that never, not even once, the Synoptic gospels state that God is love. It is true that the first three gospels describe the loving, caring and forgiving nature of God the Father through many parables. But they stop short of stating it explicitly that God loves us. It was the fourth evangelist who disclosed the secret love of God in unambiguous terms: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (Jn 3,16). This verse is acclaimed for long as the gospel in miniature.

The concept of love (*agape*) occupies an important place in the Johannine writings. This is evident from a mere survey of the occurrence of the term in John's writings. Of the total 141 uses of the verb form of love (*agapan*) in the NT, 71 times it appears in the Johannine corpus. So also the word *philein* (to love) is seen altogether 25 times in the NT. Of these 15 times it is used by John.¹ But, it is worth asking who loves whom? Normally we think of Jesus' love. But for whom? We may be tempted to think of Jesus' love for his Father. A brief overview of the fourth gospel, however, furnishes us with the curious piece of information that John hardly speaks of the love of Jesus to his Father.² This is all the more striking when we note that God's love for Jesus is repeated again and again in the fourth Gospel.

The love dynamism in the fourth gospel is in the direction of Father – Son – disciples – believers. The Father loves the son ("The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing" Jn 5,20); The son loves the disciples ("As the Father has loved me so I have loved you" Jn 15,9) and the disciples should love one another ("Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another" Jn 13,34). In short, Jesus shares with the disciples the love the Father has showered

1 R. E. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John*, 1 (AB 29), Doubleday, New York, 1966, 497. The term *agapan* is found 36 times in the fourth gospel, 31 times in the Johannine letters and 4 times in the book of revelation.

2 STAUFFER, *Agapao, agape, agapetos*, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* 1 (1972) 21-55, 52.

upon him. Now it is up to the disciples to share with one another the love they experienced from Jesus. This is after all the new commandment of Jesus: "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another" (Jn 13,34). What is the peculiarity of Jesus' love for the disciples? How come the age old principle of love became a new commandment?

The New Commandment of Love

Love is given as the new commandment in John. Johannine scholars debate what the newness in the "new" command is. Some find the newness in granting the precept of love the status of a commandment. A wider agreement is found on the view that the newness consists in the new standard of love: "as I have loved you." The commandment is new in the sense that it insists on loving others just as Jesus did. The OT had enjoined to love one's neighbor as one loves oneself. It seems that several popular books base this commandment found in the synoptic gospels as the basis for the self-love. The texts in Matthew, Mark and Luke, however, do not teach self-love. True love (*agape*) is devoid of all love for oneself. Nevertheless, we may say that these texts on loving others as one loves oneself at least recognize self-love as a powerful drive in human beings.

When Jesus ordained his disciples to love others as he loved them, he is of course claiming that his love for the disciples is stronger than their own powerful drive of self-love. It will not take too long for any one to recognize how weak sometimes our self-love can be. Moments when we hardly love ourselves or even hate ourselves are not rare in the experience of many of us. No wonder, Jesus distrusts self-love and decides not to make our own self-love the standard of the new practice of love. It is only when we love one another as Jesus loved we become truly his disciples. How did then, Jesus love us?

New Commandment in Context

In order to understand the full import of the new commandment of love one has to look at it from its context. By context what we mean here is the narrative context. John narrates the event of Jesus giving the new commandment during his last supper, a farewell meal with his own disciples. After the highly symbolic and deeply moving

act of washing his disciples' feet, Jesus announces with deep distress (Jn 13,21) that "one of you will betray me" (Jn 13,21). This was apparently a great shock for the disciples. After a while Jesus predicts yet another failure from someone none other than Peter. It is in between these two predictions viz., the prediction of Judas' betrayal (13,21-30) and Peter's denial (13, 36-38) that Jesus gives the new commandment of love (13,31-35). This means that it is exactly at the moment when Jesus bore the full measure of human lovelessness, ingratitude, infidelity, betrayal and hatred that Jesus gave this new commandment. In other words, it was exactly at the moment when it was impossible for anybody to advise others to love that Jesus announced the new commandment. What does that imply?

Jesus' issuing the love commandment in the most hostile situation implies, among other things, two points which interest us. First, it teaches how God loves us. It teaches that God loves us even when we are all prepared to betray him, abandon him and deny him most heartlessly in the business of our daily life. Even when pressed by the sheer wickedness of human sinfulness of his own disciples, Jesus did not retreat. Rather, "he loved his own to the end" (Jn 13,1) i.e., till the end of his life and till the extreme end of the possibility of love.³

Secondly, it teaches us how to love at all. If we decide to love we have to love without looking at what others do to us or possibly will do to us. In the day-to-day life, if we are keen to love only those who reciprocate to us in the way we want them to, then we will not be able to love many. Thus, the context of Jesus' giving us the command of love proves to us that love (*agape*) can exist for most of the times only as a forgiving love. Hence, loving one another is almost always an exercise of loving the enemies.⁴

3 The word *telos* used in Jn 13,1 is customarily identified as an instance of the Johannine use of terms with double meaning. *Telos* can mean either 'full' or 'end' i.e., to the end of love or to the end of Jesus' life.

4 While the synoptic gospels speak of the love of enemies, the Johannine writings, in spite of their greater concentration on the theme of love apparently miss a message concerning the love of enemies. The usual explanation given to the absence of the teaching on the love of enemies is based on the life situation of the Johannine community which was wounded by false teachers and their teachings. It is said that John was more concerned about the problem of internal unity and fraternal love than the wider question of loving those outside the community. While accepting this explanation, one may also hold that love in

If Jesus' act of foot washing is understood as symbolizing Jesus' sacrificial death⁵ whereby he sanctifies the believers, then it is striking to note that Jesus washed the feet of all the disciples including Judas and Peter. This act shows that Jesus' love embraces all and rejects none. It is the experience of the all-embracing love that brought Peter to repentance. Here we are given the divine wisdom that only true love can bring about true conversion. At the same time, in spite of Jesus' loving to the end and washing the feet, Judas hardened his heart. It thus brings to light the truth that while the divine forgiving love is extended to all it is up to each one of us to set its limits by accepting or rejecting it.

If in the NT what Jesus teaches is a lesson of forgiving love, we may do well to look at the OT teaching on love as well. For this we look at the book of Jonah.

Jonah and Description of God's Love

In the OT, one of the terms that expresses the notion of God's love is the term *hesed*. The good news is that it cannot be adequately translated into English. Nevertheless in English, *hesed* is rendered as kindness, mercy, steadfast love, etc.⁶ In its secular use, the term *hesed* connotes the idea of kindness, goodness and mercy. In the religious sense, that is, when applied to Yahweh, the term *hesed* focuses on the notion of mercy, grace and forbearance. In other words, Yahweh's *hesed* means, his endless reconciling love, always ready to forgive.⁷ It is striking to note that while in the secular use of the term *hesed* never included the aspect of forgiveness, in the religious

any concrete life situation involves the love of those whom we don't like. Jesus' act of love itself was no different. It seems that rather than by a word, Jesus imparts the message of the love of enemy by his deeds especially by the deed of foot washing which is nothing other than the enactment of true love in practice.

- 5 The act of foot washing can very well be understood as a symbolic enactment of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. This is because, in the words of Jesus himself, he was performing an act of cleansing when he washed the feet of disciples with water. Jesus cleansed or sanctified the disciples and the humanity as a whole not with water but with his blood.
- 6 W. KLASSEN, *Love*, in *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 4 (1972) 375-396, 377.
- 7 ZOBEL, *Hesed*, in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* 5, (1986) 44-64, 63.

sense, the idea of Yahweh's forgiveness gained prominence.⁸ One of the chief characteristics of *hesed* is that it involves reciprocity. This means that one who is graced with an act of *hesed* has the duty to respond to his benefactor in the same way. And one who has shown an act of *hesed* has the right to expect a similar act of *hesed* from the other.⁹

In the OT, kindness (*hesed*) was considered even as the very essence of God. The idea was so deep rooted in the mind of Israel as to call God "my kindness" (Ps 144,2). Even in the book of Jonah, those idolaters who forsake Yahweh were called as those who 'forsake their kindness' (Jon 2,8). In both these texts, the notion of kindness stands for God himself.¹⁰ The Prophet Jeremiah (9, 24) describes Yahweh as one who by nature practices kindness (*hesed*). The Psalmist considers kindness as the norm according to which Yahweh acts and his actions are to be judged (Ps 66,20).

The divine *Hesed* is found conditioned in Ex 20,5-6 and Dt 5,9-10. This means that God bestows his steadfast love to Israel when it is obedient to his covenant. However, God's loving kindness (*hesed*) is not completely dependent upon Israel's obedience. The term is stretched beyond its secular usage to incorporate the possibility of forgiveness as an act of divine *hesed*.¹¹

The idea that Yahweh's essence is kindness and he is always waiting to forgive the repentant sinner is all well and good if it is all about God's relationship to Israel. But what if it is further extended to depict God's attitude towards Israel's enemies? The ordinary Jews who were maltreated at the hand of the cruel rulers of the oppressing countries could never for a moment digest the idea that Yahweh would forgive their enemies once they repented of their evil ways. They wanted Yahweh to vindicate them by punishing their wicked enemies. Thus, the prophet Jonah becomes the representative figure of the

8 KLASSEN, *Love*, 379.

9 ZOBEL, *Hesed*, 47. In the story in Gen 21,23 we see Ahimelech, the host of Abraham in his sojourn, asks Abraham to show him and his land the same *hesed* that he has rendered to Abraham. So also the prostitute Rahab expects the Israelite spies to respond with the same *hesed* she had shown to them.

10 ZOBEL, *Hesed*, 62.

11 KLASSEN, *Love*, 379.

embittered and narrow minded Jews who were waiting for God to crush their enemies. It is in this context that the tragedy of Jonah becomes a parody of Jonah.

It is not here the place to discuss the literary genre or the historicity of the account narrated in the book of Jonah. There is a mention of "Jonah, son of Amittai" in 2 Kgs 14,25-27. The name of the father of Jonah is interesting. Amittai is associated with term *emet* which means truth. In the OT, *hesed* and *emet* appear together in several places and they are considered as hendiadys in which *emet* affirms the permanence and certainty of *hesed*.¹² According to 2 Kgs 14,25-27, Jonah carried out his prophetic ministry during the period of the King Jeroboam. We have no other details concerning Jonah or his ministry from the book of Kings or Chronicles. The similarity between Jonah of 2 Kgs and the character in the book of Jonah supposedly begins and ends with the similarity in name. The rest of what we see in the book of Jonah is according to a general scholarly consensus is pure fiction. Generally it is described as a parable and as such as having nothing to do with history. But what is the significance of the story of Jonah in the context of our study?

God's Love as Mercy and Forgiveness

A short description of the story of Jonah will bring the dynamism of divine love to the fore. The dynamism of God's love is revealed through the constant foul play of the prophet. What we find in the book of Jonah is not an actual account but a caricature of the prophet. In the book, the prophet appears as one who is constantly wrestling with the divine plan. Though called as a prophet, he is reluctant to preach the word of repentance. He dislikes the place assigned for his ministry. Even the success of his ministry is disgusting to the prophet.

The story is full of sarcasm. When God asked Jonah to preach in Nineveh which is in the East, he sets out to Tarshish, the extreme western end of the then known world!¹³ When the vessel he boarded was rocked in the tempest, the Gentile captain of the ship and the

12 ZOBEL, *Hesed*, 48.

13 J. A. BEWER, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jonah*, T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1999, 57.

sailors pray to their gods whereas the prophet of God sleeps. It is the gentiles who ask the prophet to pray to his God. This irony is heightened when Jonah introduces Yahweh as the maker of sea but neglects to pray to him in time of distress at the sea. Jonah's words were taken at face value by the gentiles in the ship and they begin to pray to Yahweh. Even when the prophet finally reached Nineveh, he was reluctant to preach the message of repentance. In the heart of heart he wanted the people of Nineveh whose "wickedness has come up before [God]" (Jon 1,2) to be punished. Nineveh was a town with three days' walking distance. One day's journey would have taken Jonah to the heart of the city. After covering just a single day's distance he starts preaching willy-nilly. His words were anything other than a passionate appeal to conversion. He did not preach God's mercy and not even the name of God was uttered. He just said, "Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown" (Jon 3,4).¹⁴ However, the result was amazing and for Jonah disastrous. Before he could speak a second sentence, the people repented.¹⁵ No wonder, the book of Jonah turned to be the book in the prophetic literature with shortest prophetic speech. His preaching consists just of five Hebrew words.

A nation-wide fasting was declared by the king who too clothed in sackcloth and sat in ashes. The king and his people turned away from their evil ways. Seeing their repentance God too 'repented' of his first decision and in his *hesed* he forgave them. This greatly displeased the prophet. Jonah was angry not because "his personal prestige would be lost by the non-occurrence of the doom which he had announced but because Nineveh had been spared and because he himself had brought this about by his warning."¹⁶ He complains: "O, Lord, is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast

14 To overthrow means to destroy. The same word is used for the destruction of Sodom in Gen 19,21. It refers to the completeness of destruction and not the mode of destruction. BEWER, *Jonah*, 52.

15 BEWER, *Jonah*, 54 draws our attention to yet another irony involved here. A few words of a single prophet elicited most sincere repentance in the heart of the heathen whereas the repeated exhortations and warnings of a series of prophets did not produce adequate response from God's chosen people.

16 BEWER, *Jonah*, 57.

love [*hesed*] and ready to relent from punishment.” (Jonah 4,2).¹⁷ In his great despair Jonah wanted to die. One can make an interesting comparison between Jonah and the prophet Jeremiah and Elijah. All the three wanted to die. The sorrow of Jeremiah and Elijah was that their prophetic ministry was a failure and people hesitated to heed their words (Jer 32,16-25; 1Kgs 19,4). Now, Jonah wants to die because his ministry was successful and people listened to his words and repented. Their repentance brought to them God’s forgiveness. Jonah felt that his words of doom were thwarted by the *hesed* of God!

The prophet becoming sad to death at the mercy that God showered upon the Gentile people is hardly worth his calling. This is what makes the story of Jonah a satire at propheticism. Jonah is possibly the representative figure of fanatic particularism which restricts salvation to a particular group, which attempts to hold for themselves the keys of right and wrong, good and bad, damnation and salvation. It tries to control God and plans his course of action. Jonah stands for all who thinks or wants God to be a harsh judge, dispensing blind justice which knows no mercy. But the book of Jonah describes a God who surpasses even the prophetic calculations. He is the God of *hesed* who expresses love as forgiveness. The story of Jonah by caricaturing a self-righteous prophet describes what it means to conceive God as love.

Conclusion: God’s Love is Mercy and Justly So

John defines God as love. This revelation he received from the experience of being loved by Jesus – as the one who was reclining next to him at the last supper (Jn 13, 23) – who in turn learned the love of the Father by remaining close to the Father’s heart (1,18). According to the Johannine teaching one who does not love is neither a child of God nor the disciple of Jesus. But it is not any kind of love that makes one a disciple of Jesus but he must practice the kind of love for which Jesus himself is the model. It is the love that loves and

17 This is a text which very well explains the nature of God’s relationship to Israel. That it is repeated in several places in the OT (Ex 34,6-7; Ps 86,15; Ps 103,8; Neh 9,7; Jon 4,2) proves that this notion was effectively crystallized in the collective mind of Israel. While this notion of God’s *hesed* was a source of constant consolation for the Israel, for Jonah God acting with the same *hesed* towards the heathen became a source of distress.

forgives to the end i.e., to the end of one's life and to the extreme end of forgiveness. It is the love that expresses itself in the humble service of foot washing to those who are of no use or worse to those who plot their death. This is the love that one has to practice during the single supper of one's whole life time. This love is nothing other than *hesed*, i.e., mercy.¹⁸

If God is love, it also means that he remains love even when we are sinners.¹⁹ Our wickedness cannot but make God what he actually is. God is always *hesed*. That is why he showers his mercy upon every one irrespective of what one is or does.²⁰ It is not when God condemns the wicked that he becomes just but when he saves them. Because it is the saving activity that does justice to the true nature of God. That means, God acts justly when he acts mercifully because when God acts mercifully he acts according to his revealed nature. This enables us to speak of God's justice in terms of his love which is mercy. As it is mercy it is unmerited and gratuitous.

God's *hesed* towards us shapes our relationship to God as one of gratitude. The experience of *hesed* from God should also make our attitudes and actions towards every human being irrespective of what or who s/he is or does, as one of *hesed* i.e., loving kindness. Here is where Prophet Jonah failed. Here is where anyone can fail. The

18 It is not just John alone who highlights the gratuitous nature of God's love. The synoptic gospels also equate the divine justice with God's loving kindness. In Matthew, the parable of the workers in the vineyard makes this point amply clear (Mt 20,1-19??). Of the five group of laborers whom the owner sends to his vineyard only with the first group he engages in a contract. To the second, third and fourth group of workers he offers a just wage. To the last group he does not promise anything but they too might have expected a just wage for their one hour work. At the end of the day all were given full daily wage. In the last analysis the wage given to all the last four groups was not a just wage but a generous wage. What was offered was a just wage but what was proffered was a generous wage. It reiterates the truth that God acts justly when he acts mercifully. God's justice is mercy. It is this sheer mercy as a gratuitous gift that is required of the disciples under the new commandment of love. This is what the good Samaritan does in the gospel of Luke. The Samaritan cares for an enemy and thereby becomes the model of forgiving and merciful love

19 This is what St. Paul reminds us when he says that Jesus died for us when we were sinners.

20 The synoptic gospels highlight the impartiality of God in sending the sunshine and rain to the righteous and the wicked alike and advise us to imitate it.

notion of God's mercy was very pleasing to him as long as it was showered exclusively upon himself and his own people, the Israelites. But the moment God decided to forgive the Ninevites, the brutal enemies of Israel, Jonah became furious. He celebrated his miraculous escape through the belly of a whale and praised God with a thanksgiving Psalm. But he could not stand the escape of a large nation from the sea of God's judgment. Jonah was so soft hearted to grieve at the untimely destruction of a castor bean plant (Jonah 4,9). But he was so hard hearted to get angry at the survival of a nation. Jonah wanted to monopolize God and his mercy to himself and to his people alone. He did not recognize that Yahweh is the only God and he is the God of all. As God of all, everyone has the right to experience God's *hesed*.

"The love of God is wider than the measures of human mind. And the heart of the Eternal is most wonderfully kind. But we make his love too narrow by false limits of our own."²¹ Yes, loving and forgiving is God's way of being God or a just God. By holding a selfish notion of God and his love and justice we attempt to curtail God's freedom to "be good" (Mt 20,15) and run the risk of ridiculing our discipleship and getting ourselves caricatured just like the sorry figure of Jonah.

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21 BEWER, *Jonah*, 64.

Praxis of Justice and Charity

Hormis Mynatty

It is a truism that more frequently than not Christian tradition has sacrificed demands of justice on behalf of doing charity. It calls for a sustained consideration on the relation between justice and charity. The encyclical letter of Benedict XVI *Deus Caritas est* dwells on this topic. In this regard it argues that the role of the church in the construction of a just society consists in providing a moral awakening in the people about the demands of justice. This essay written by Dr. Hormis Mynatty, moral theologian from St. Joseph Pontifical Seminary, Mangalapuzha, examines the dynamics between charity and justice. In this exercise he critically makes use of the approach of the social encyclical tradition of the Catholic church towards the issues at stake.

1. Introduction

Justice is one of the fundamental notions of moral and juridical life. Justice is defined as “the fulfillment of that to which our neighbor has a strict right” or as “rendering each one what is his due by right.” The demands of justice are of definite and determinable nature and therefore they are on principle enforceable. Consequently, the violated claims of justice demand restitution or at least compensation. Social justice demands the equitable distribution of wealth among social groups and among nations according to their share in the economic process, to their contribution to the common welfare, and to their right to a worthy human life. Hence the accumulation of a nation’s wealth in the hands of a few extremely rich people, while the majority of citizens live in poverty and misery, offends the very idea of social justice. It is in this perspective that we discuss the question of praxis of justice and charity in the perspective of the social teaching of the

church, especially in the context of the first encyclical of the present pope Benedict XVI namely, *Deus Caritas Est*, which deals with this topic elaborately.¹

2. *Deus Caritas Est*

In his encyclical letter *Deus Caritas Est*, the pope writes that the church's deepest nature is expressed in her three-fold inseparable responsibility of proclaiming the word of God, celebrating the Sacraments and exercising the ministry of charity.² Love of neighbor, grounded in the love of God is the most fundamental responsibility of each individual Christian and also the church as a whole. For the church, charity is not a kind of optional social work but an indispensable expression of her very being and part of the very essence of her mission in the world. The exercise of charity is an action of the church as such and like the ministry of the word and sacrament, it too has always been an essential part of her mission. This encyclical points out that awareness of this responsibility has had a constitutive relevance in the church from the beginning (20). Those who believed in Jesus formed a community and they had all things in common. They were ready to share whatever they had (Acts. 2: 44-45). As the church spread to different parts of the world, the ministry of exercise of charity became established as one of her essential activities along with other ministries.

However, in her over-enthusiasm to insist on the need of charity the church is accused of disregarding the equally important need of emphasizing the establishment of justice. Since the nineteenth century an objection has been raised against the activities of charity of the church. "Works of charity —almsgiving— are in effect a way for the rich to shirk their obligations to work for justice and a means of soothing their consciences, while preserving their own status and robbing the poor of their rights" (26). According to them, instead of maintaining the status quo through individual acts of charity, we need to build a just social order in which all receive their due share of the world's goods.

In the present encyclical the pope discloses the close link between charity and justice (26-29). What is the role of the church in

1 Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, Vatican, 2005.

2 Ibid. 25.

establishing justice? The pope states that the just ordering of the society and the state is a central responsibility of politics. Justice is both the aim and the intrinsic criterion of all politics. Faith will enable reason to find out properly what is just. The aim of the social teaching of the church is simply to help to purify reason and to contribute here and now to the acknowledgement and attainment of what is just. The church can tell what the requirements of justice are. Building a just social and civil order is a political task and it is not the immediate responsibility of the church. The church cannot and must not take upon herself the political battle to bring about a just society (28).

At the same time this encyclical states that the church cannot and must not remain disinterested in the fight for justice. In this task the role of the church is to reawaken the spiritual energy of the people without which justice cannot prevail and prosper. Only those who are ready to undergo certain sacrifices can contribute to the establishment of peace. According to the pope, a just society must be the achievement of politics, not of the church. Yet the promotion of justice through the efforts to bring about openness of mind and will, to the demands of common good, is something, which concerns the church deeply (28). Hence, according to the present encyclical, the role of the church in the construction of a just society is to provide a moral awakening in the people. Benedict XVI admits that there is a close link between the commitment to just ordering of the society and organized charitable activity in the life of the church. But at the same time he thinks that formation of a just society is not directly the duty of the church. She is called to contribute to the purification of reason and to the re-awakening of those moral forces without which just structures cannot be established. In this perspective the direct duty to work for the just ordering of society is proper to the lay faithful (29). Does this stand of the present encyclical comply with the previous social teachings of the church?

3. Traditional Social Teachings of the church

Imbibing the spirit of the early church, St. Augustine defined justice as "*justitia est in subveniundo miseris*" (justice is in coming to the assistance of the poor).³ Relying on these words of Augustine Peter Lombard also explained justice as coming to the assistance of the

3 St. Augustine, *De Trinitate*, Book 14, ch. 9.

poor in his *Sentences*.⁴ Many commentators on the *Sentences*, before Thomas Aquinas, accepted this definition of Augustine and Lombard. Some of the commentators differentiated between mercy and justice. If the motive of giving to the poor is simply compassion, then it is mercy. If it is done because it is due to the other person, then it is justice. Aquinas did not accept the above said definition of justice by Lombard and his commentators, for while they insist on giving to the poor motivated by mercy, they do not argue that distributing the superfluous wealth to the poor is a question of justice. According to St. Thomas, a person who is really rich has the obligation to help the poor and this is not merely a question of doing charity but something strictly demanded by justice.⁵

Pope Benedict XVI claims in this encyclical *Deus Caritas est* that from *Rerum Novarum* till the present day social teachings of the church have contributed substantial guidelines needed for the just ordering of society. He also thinks that it can help the modern people in order to solve even problems emerging from globalization. In this context we examine briefly the contributions of the social teaching of the church in the establishment of social justice.

3.1 *Rerum Novarum* (1891)

From the time of *Rerum Novarum*, which marked the modern phase of Catholic social teaching of the church, the magisterium forcefully pointed to the prophetic duty of the church to challenge people to meet the obligations of justice. In this encyclical Pope Leo XIII tried to articulate in a systematic way a theology of social justice. Even though he was addressing the problems of industrialization, the stated objective of the document was to specify the “principles which truth and justice dictates” for dealing with the “misery and wretchedness” caused by the industrial revolution. Even though this encyclical is not that radical compared to more recent ones in articulating the requirements of social justice, it is a protest against the exploitation of the poor workers which was the burning issue of that time. The intervention of Leo XII meant that the church could not be indifferent to justice in the socio-economic system. *Rerum*

4 P.Lombard, *Sentences*, III Book.

5 ST. II-II, q.118, Q.4, ad.2.

Novarum recognized the fact that justice involves not only mere individual good will. Justice is considered as some thing very basic to the very pattern of the society.

But his preoccupation with stability in the society did not allow him to advocate a structural change in order to establish justice. He wanted change to happen through the conversion of the rich and the powerful. Therefore he did not encourage structural transformation (17). This approach undoubtedly diminished the effectiveness of RN. The moralizing approach was the main cause of the ineffectiveness of the magisterial teaching.

3.2 Pius X (1903-1914)

The distinction between justice and charity becomes very conspicuous in the writings of Pius X. While *Rerum Novarum* speaks both of obligations of justice and charity it does not come to the drastic conclusions of Pius X. In a *motu proprio* of 1903 called *Fin dalla prima* he states: "To calm the strife between rich and poor, it is necessary to distinguish between justice and charity. Only when justice has been violated is there right to make a claim, in the strict sense of the word." He continues in another section of the same document. "Finally, let Catholic writers, while upholding the cause of the people and of the poor, beware of using language which may inspire the masses with hatred of the upper class of the society. Let them not talk of claims and of justice, when it is question of mere charity...."⁶ From this perspective to strive for a just social order is not a social responsibility demanded by justice but it is simply a question of charity. This is not a moral requirement binding everybody. Then it becomes simply an optional social work and you are not guilty for not carrying out that task.

3.3 *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931)

The most significant change in *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931) of Pius XI was the development of the notion of social justice into a key ethical concept in Catholic social teaching. The use of the concept of social justice indicated the emergence of a new awareness in Catholic social thought that human dignity makes a genuine moral demand

6 D. Dorr, *Options of the Poor: A Hundred Years of Vatican Social Teaching*, Dublin, 1983, p. 53.

upon the structural patterns by which social life is organized. This also points to the need for a conscious social change. Pius XI was fully aware that change of heart alone was not sufficient to solve social problems because even the well-intentioned employers are trapped in the structures of the society that embodied injustice and perpetrated injustice. In this context he insisted on alternative structures designed to provide justice to the employees. Due to the undue concern for social stability Pius XI also could do little more than simply to protest. Though social stability is important, it is not the only social value or even the highest value. There may be social situations where justice challenges the basic economic, social and political structures radically. Both Leo XIII and Pius XI seem to have failed to recognize this fact.⁷

3.4 *Mater et Magistra* (1961)

In his two important encyclicals, *Mater et Magistra* (1961) and *Pacem in Terris* (1963), John XXIII addresses mainly the question what improvements are needed in economic, social and political affairs in order that people may have more human and just living conditions. At the same time he failed to address the equally important question how of these changes can be brought about. He reminds those who want to change “situations where requirements of justice are not satisfied” and those who tend to make recourse to revolution, that to proceed gradually is the law of life and hence it is not possible to change human institutions for better except by working from within them gradually (PT 61-62). Finally his exhortation to establish justice is simply restricted to conversion of heart (MM 263). At the same time his social teachings were a major step toward the prevention of the ideological use of church teaching to support the status quo, and hence it marks a turning point in Catholic social teaching (PT 65).

3.5 New orientations in Vatican II (1963-1965)

We find a substantial change in the outlook of the Catholic church in Vatican II. The council wanted to form the consciousness of the people with regard to the power structures, which block the realization of human rights and human dignity. The unjust institutions—economic, political, cultural, military, and media—intertwine and reinforce each

7 Ibid. p. 74.

other and often a small powerful elite dominate these oppressive structures and such structures together constitute a system of injustice. That is why the council engaged in an analysis of the social structures, which perpetuate serious divisions between the rich and the poor (GS 4, 8, 9, 13) and specially made mention of the sufferings the poor, marginalized and the oppressed people undergo “for a sin they did not commit” (GS 27). The Council observes that the excessive economic and social differences between people cause scandal and militate against social justice, equity and the dignity of the human person (GS 29). It suggests: “This social order requires constant improvement. It must be founded on truth, built on justice, and animated by love; and in freedom it should grow everyday toward a more human balance. An improvement in attitudes and widespread changes in society will have to take place if these objectives are to be gained” (GS 26). According to the council, the Christians, being faithful to the gospel, have to take up a serious task that has to be fulfilled in this world in cooperation with every person who loves and practices justice. This task is so important that they have to give an account before God concerning this task (GS 93).

Unlike the social teaching of the church of the past, the council seems to give equal importance both to the conversion of heart and social transformation in the creation of just social order. This may be due to the changed attitude of the church with regard to the world and the new consciousness about the relationship between development of the world and the kingdom of God.

3.6 *Populorum Progressio* (1967)

Paul VI in his encyclical *Populorum Progressio* points to the fate of the majority of the world population who are deprived of the base necessities of life and excluded from the opportunity to a just participation in the economic, social, political and cultural life. He says, “there are certainly situations whose injustice cries to heaven” (PP 30). He proposes that “the present situation must be faced with courage and injustices linked with it must be fought against and overcome. He thinks that the more important agents of the change of structures that inflict oppression are those who are already have wealth, power and influence. Therefore this development demands bold transformation, innovations that go deep into the root of the

problem, urgent reforms should be undertaken without delay" (PP32). However for this change he preferred a consensus model rather than a confrontation model except in a situation of flagrant and longstanding violation of fundamental rights (PP 31, 49). Naturally this encyclical also has ended up as a moral exhortation to the rich.

3.7 Justice in the World (1971)

The 1971 synod of bishops established a theological foundation for the Church's social involvement not only as a right but also as an obligation. The Gospel that the church preaches is one that liberates man and society from the evils of situations and structures. This is the fundamental reason of the social mission of the Church. Therefore, in the synodal document *Justice in the World* we find: "Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel or, in other words, of the Church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situations" (JW 6). Even though the synod insists on personal conversion (JW 29), it is aware of the fact that a renewal of heart is not possible "if it ignores the objective obstacles which social structures place in the way of conversion of hearts" (JW 16). Here we find that the church emphasizes on establishing justice, while engaging in charitable activities. This is the reason why the synod exhorts that "our action is to be directed above all to those men and nations which because of various forms of oppression and because of the present character of our society are silent, indeed voiceless victims of injustice" (JW 20).

3.8 Sollicitudo Rei Socialis (1987)

In this Encyclical John Paul II examining certain crucial social issues, states that many of the social justice issues ask for international solution. The pope is advocating a "commitment to justice" with an international outlook, but with an option for the poor. In the face of the growing number of the poor and their poverty, economic and political realities should be marked by the option for the poor. To ignore this fact will be living like the 'rich man' pretending not to know the beggar Lazarus (42). In a situation where innumerable multitude of people are suffering under the burden of poverty, various forms of exploitation, economic, social, political, cultural and religious oppression, discrimination, etc., the pope says that it is the Lord Jesus

himself who questions those who are responsible for such situations (14-15). "One of the greatest injustices in the contemporary world consists precisely in this: that the ones who possess much are relatively few and those who possess almost nothing are many" (28). Therefore this option for the poor asks for urgent reforms in the international trade systems, the world monetary and financial systems, the question of exchange of technology, etc. Liberation from unjust economic or political structures cannot be achieved without the collaboration of the international community. At stake is the dignity of the human person whose defense and promotion is the strict responsibility of everyone. The church as a whole should be engaged in this task remembering the correct relationship between temporal progress and the kingdom of God (48).

The solution proposed by the pope to overcome structural injustice seems to be ineffective. What the pope suggests for social transformation is conversion to solidarity with the poor and a will to act in common. According to him, it is solidarity that enables people for the reconstruction of the oppressive structures in which they live. The solidarity, which John Paul II proposes, does not seem to be easily feasible by a mere moral awakening of the rich and the poor. If anybody goes on insisting on a universal solidarity which is the result of a moral conversion of everybody, rich and the poor alike, in order to avoid any hint of class struggle, it will end up in mere moral exhortation, which was the usual trend of the social teaching of the church in the past.

3.9 Limitations of the social teachings

The social teachings of the church, especially since Vatican II, insist on the need of action on behalf of justice to all and encourage a just social situation which provides a decent human living to all. It has been seen as a part of the mission of the church. However, in order to carry out this mission the church always opts for a consensus model instead of a confrontation model. The church firmly believes that lasting justice and peace cannot be established through class struggle and revolution. The alternative the church proposes is the social change brought about through the conversion of heart of both those who perpetrate injustice and also its victims. The most important limitation of the social teachings seems to be the one-sided emphasis

on personal conversion without giving adequate importance to the transformation of social structures, which are the main sources of injustice. It is merely a wishful thinking to believe that social transformation will happen automatically if conversion of heart takes place. It is also very naïve to believe that solidarity between the rich and the poor on an international level is feasible through mere conversion of heart and that will automatically bring about a just solution for all the social problems.

The present encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* also seems to be under the grip of the above said limitations on a higher degree. According to this document, a struggle for injustice is exclusively that of the State and not of the church. The pope says that a just society must be the achievement of politics and not of the church. At the same time the pope insists that the church cannot remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice. The promotion of justice through efforts to bring about openness of mind and will to the demands of the common good is something which concerns the church deeply. However, it is said that the role of the church is merely to provide the needed moral inspiration to this end to reawaken the spiritual energy of the people without which justice cannot prevail and prosper (29). The pope does not seem to accept even the theology of the social involvement of the Church emphasized in the social teachings of the church since Vatican II.

Then what is the position of the pope with regard to this issue? He states: "We contribute to a better world only by personally doing good now, with full commitment and wherever we have the opportunity, independently of partisan strategies and programmes" (31). For Benedict XVI the Christian's programme - the programme of Jesus - is the programme of the Good Samaritan, doing charity. Therefore while giving utmost importance to charity, the pope does not seem to give equal emphasis to justice in this encyclical.

The pope is following the same stand also in his recent apostolic exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*.⁸ He whole-heartedly admits the fact that the restoration of justice is a condition for building true peace. He also recognizes the fact that this may need the strong determination to transform unjust structures and to restore respect

8 Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, Vatican, 2007.

for the dignity of all human persons. At the same time he insists, "it is not the proper task of the church to engage in the political work of bringing about the most just society possible". However he states that the church cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the struggle for justice. Even then referring to his own position in *Deus Caritas est*, the pope says that in this commitment to justice the church "has to play her part through rational argument and she has to reawaken the spiritual energy of the people without which justice, which always demands sacrifice, cannot prevail and prosper" (89).

4. Justice and charity from a moral perspective

Charity is always needed and the love and concern for the needy who happen to live in inhuman situations is its motivation. But charity should not be a substitute for justice. From a moral perspective prior to works of charity are the demands of justice. Charitable works can never be a substitute for denied justice. Moral teaching demands that obligations of justice be fulfilled prior to any works of charity. In as much as the duties of justice are the minimum requirements of love, they are always graver and more urgent than duties motivated by love. Justice means giving a person what is his due or what is his right. By the mere fact that somebody is doing some charity to another person is not an adequate reason to deny justice to him. Any violation of justice demands restitution. Charity can never be a substitute for the denied justice. When somebody cannot do proper restitution for denied rights properly due to certain practical problems, then it can be substituted by charitable activities. An employer who does not pay just wage to his employees, even if he does some charity to them, cannot be considered a substitute for justice. However, a person who has failed to pay somebody what s/he deserves cannot compensate it by doing charity. Instead he has to give it back to those who really deserve it.⁹ Similarly justice demands one to pay proper tax and it is not allowed to substitute it with certain charitable activities. Vatican II insists that the demands of justice should first be satisfied lest the giving of what is due in justice be represented as the offering of a charitable gift (AA 8).

Christian tradition always insisted on the need of doing charity. The church tried to deal with poverty through charity. It seems that

9 K. H. Peschke, *Christian Ethics*, vol.2, Alcester, 1985, p.130

the church also tried to address the questions of justice through mere acts of charity. This distinction of charity and justice and subordinating the latter to the former had certain undesirable consequences in the tradition of the church. As Archbishop Oscar Romero once mentioned it is a caricature of love to try to compensate with almsgiving what is lacking in justice. What is needed is a healthy integration of both justice and charity in the social involvement of the church.

Even though the duties of justice are primary and obligatory, Christians can never lose sight of the higher ideals of love. Action on behalf of justice should be animated by love. The demands of love often exceed what justice can provide. There is a close relation between the two. Whatever justice demands is also demanded by love. The demands of justice constitute its minimum requirements which can never be dispensed with. Its violation always demands restitution. In this way justice secures the most basic indispensable requirements for human existence, self-realization and life in the community. At the same time justice is to be motivated by the spirit of love. The reason is that only love is able to know fully what is properly due to the neighbor. It is love that should temper the rigid demands of justice whenever this is more in agreement with the true welfare of the neighbor and the community. The requirement of social justice in particular is clearly discernible only in the brotherly view of love. Christians should not aim at carrying out the mere literal demands of justice but also try earnestly to fulfill the urgent demands of the higher ideals of Christian charity. According to this perspective, one's superfluous goods must be used in a socially responsible way, especially for the benefit of the needy. It is not demanded that all the superfluous goods be spent in alms giving. But the social character of all property demands that one's possessions are used with a sense of social responsibility in view of the welfare of the poor and the needy. St. Augustine declares: "The superfluities which you possess should be the necessities of life of the poor."

As we do justice in our personal and interpersonal behavior, we should not be satisfied with the mere one on charity, when there is the possibility to strive for the gradual formation of a just society, which can do justice to all. Such a stance will help only to maintain and perpetrate the status quo. Justice demands that we help people to construct a social situation where their just rights are properly

met. There is a strong thirst for social justice among modern people today and they are ready to undergo any sacrifice to this end. As Donal Dorr observes, there seem to be two major contributions of the social teachings of the church in regard to the kingdom value of justice. One is the clear vision of how a truly just society would look like. That vision pinpoints the different elements that go to make up social justice. From a Christian perspective what we aim at is 'a just, participative, and sustainable' society. Justice also requires that we be just to the future generations, by not squandering the non-renewable resources of the earth. The second equally important contribution of the social teaching of the church is the notion of the option for the poor. In order to achieve social justice there should be room for special protection of the poor in political, economic and cultural spheres.¹⁰ Referring to the mission of Christ Jon Sobrino points out that what the church requires today is a praxis of love that becomes justice. Jesus gave this type of love the first place in his praxis. His own ministry bears witness to the fact that the efficacy of love must be applied to the configuration of the whole world.¹¹ In the present context it is also necessary to avoid the pitfalls of an individualistic charity. Borrowing the phrase of Pius XII, Gustavo Gutierrez defines true charity as "political charity". To offer food or drink to the needy should be a political action aimed at transforming a society structured to benefit a few.¹²

From this perspective the primary duty of the church seems to insist on establishing justice while continuing the mission of doing charity. While engaging in charitable activities the Church may insist also on participation in actions on behalf of justice in order to restructure unjust social situations so that a decent human living can be given to large number of people. This may need not only personal conversion but also emphasis on struggle for structural transformation, which require the cooperation of majority of the people in the society. The social teaching of the church should be effective enough to motivate the people to this goal. No social order and no lasting peace are possible without respect for the demands of justice.

10 D. Dorr, *Spirituality and Justice*, New York, 1984, p.111-112.

11 J. Sobrino, *Jesus in Latin America*, New York, 1987, p.135-136.

12 G. Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, New York, 1973, p.116.

5. Conclusion

It seems that there is a real need of a proper blending of the praxis of charity and that of justice in the mission of the social involvement of the church, which is an essential dimension of the mission of the church in the world. When we disregard justice and give undue importance to mere acts of charity or when we substitute justice with charity we do not understand it properly. Both of them should always remain together. At the same time justice should be the soul and inspiration of any acts of charity. In turn all the attempts to establish justice also should be motivated by Christian love.

Even if we insist on the priority of establishing justice, we cannot imagine a context where charitable activities are not needed. Social justice aims at equal opportunity and living standards to all; but it is a goal which can be realized only very gradually. Therefore people who need our help and deserve our service will be there always. Hence charity has a role always in the mission of the church. At the same time social service of the church should not become a mere pretext to maintain the unjust social structures unquestioned. The Marxian critique of religion, that it is opium of the people, can be still relevant. As we engage in relief works to deal with the special situations of the needy, there should be organized effort in order to establish a more just social order, which may do justice to all. According to Vatican II, not only the effects but also the causes of various ills must be removed (AA 8). There should be a proper blending of the praxis of justice and that of charity in the mission of the social involvement of the church. Over-emphasis on one to the extent of disregarding the other can never do justice to the true mission of the church.

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The Church on the path of 'Caritas'

Mathew Paikada

The second part of the encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* deals with 'concrete applications of the theory' expounded in the first part. While his predecessors, especially Pope John Paul II, began the encyclicals with an analysis of the situation and proceeded to judge the situation on the basis of Gospel values and proposed relevant praxis, Pope Benedict XVI falls back to the traditional style of 'theory and application'. The content of the second part smacks of a dichotomy. The church moves on with its specific, almost exclusive, task on the one side, and the world of politics and economy are accorded with their autonomy. Do they walk on parallel lines without fruitful critical interaction? While Marxism receives a strong critique, capitalism goes scotfree, which was not the case with the Pope's predecessors. The structural character of evil in society, which makes charity often insufficient and ineffective without justice, seems to escape the attention of the Pope. The encyclical adopts an individualistic neoscholastic approach. Dr. Mathew Paikada highlights these points by comparing them with the major social encyclicals of his predecessors.

1. Introduction

The first encyclical of Pope Benedict XVI is a comprehensive and extensive presentation of the Christian perspective on the most significant theme 'love'. The very choice of the topic for his first encyclical reveals the intention of the pope to present 'love' as the fundamental criterion and ultimate goal of Christian life. The first of the two parts of the document deals with the theoretical aspect of the unity of love, while the latter part explains the practical application of the theory expounded in the former section. From the methodological point of view the encyclical follows the traditional

structure of theory and application. Although the author presents his teaching as a continuation of the social encyclicals of his predecessor (no.27), we find a different approach and emphasis as far as the content is concerned. His predecessor, pope John Paul II, had followed a different methodology too, viz. to analyse the situation to pinpoint the problem in question, to judge the situation on the basis of Gospel principles and then to propose guidelines for concrete action. Equipped with his scholarly erudition of the Greek philosophy, scholastic theology and church history, pope Benedict presents the highly complex phenomenon of 'love' with all its inter-relations at various levels with laudable lucidity and precision. He begins with a close examination of the literary expressions (forms) and proceeds on the cultural and philosophical avenues. Judging the historical developments and distortions from the standpoint of the Gospel-ethics he arrives at clear Christological and Ecclesiological doctrinal standpoints. Thus first part provides with clear insights into the dogma of the Church and provides inspiration for meditation and study. The second part of the encyclical deals with 'charity', i.e. the expressions or concrete applications of this love. The present article is a humble attempt to study this second part dealing with concrete applications of 'caritas'. In our study we will make frequent references to and comparisons with the encyclicals of pope John Paul II. This approach, we hope, will elucidate the style, content and accent of the present encyclical under consideration.

2. Structure and Method of Approach

The second part of the encyclical is titled: Caritas, the Practice of Love by the Church as a "Community of Love". The first paragraph of this section introduces the theme and the last three paragraphs serve as a conclusion. The following are the major themes dealt with in this section. (i) Revelation of the Trinitarian love, (ii) Charity: a responsibility of the Church, (iii) Relationship between justice and charity, (iv) Multiple structures of charitable service, (v) The distinctiveness of the charitable activities of the church, (vi) Persons entrusted with the responsibility to carry out ecclesial charity. The very structure of the encyclical reveals that the pope's arguments are primarily founded on ecclesiology and pastoral theology. Rectifying various misunderstandings, he has given us crisp and clear exhortations. The pope makes his stance clear with regard to the

Church and her pastoral ministry. Unlike his predecessor, he seems to adopt an explicitly ecclesio-centric perspective. Pope John Paul II, in his writings, had accorded prominence to the Reign of God and the role of the Church as the servant of this kingdom of God.

Introducing the second part, the pope highlights the working of the Holy Spirit in the Church and among the faithful. Holy Spirit is depicted here as the inner force that moves the faithful to live a life of charity and as the power that constantly converts ecclesial heart (n.19). The pope teaches us that the Spirit that binds the faithful to Christ on the basis of ecclesial life and activities. However, beyond the introductory part the role of the Holy Spirit hardly finds mention elsewhere.

A comparison of this encyclical with the *Populorum Progressio* of pope Paul VI will reveal that they are at variance with each other over the structure. The structure of the said document is as follows: In the first part that deals with the integral development of man, the present problem – the signs of the times – is analysed, the Christian vision of development is explained and the role of the Church is defined, and priority of programmes for planning and action are formulated. In the second part that deals with the development in the spirit of solidarity, the necessity of assistance to the weak is discussed in the context of equity in trade relations and universal charity. Before concluding the document pope Paul VI makes the historical declaration that 'Development is the new name for Peace'. From the point of view of content the whole accent is placed on just and humane development that is a necessary prerequisite for true and lasting peace in the world. Pope Paul VI wrote this encyclical in continuity with the pastoral constitution of Vatican II, 'Church in the Modern World' (GS). As we know, this document evolved during the session of the council itself, in order to respond creatively to the aspirations and challenges of the people, who looked towards the Church for guidelines and practical steps to make this world a better place to live in. In spite of the fact that the fathers declined to make the social cultural and political task of the Church an integral part of the fundamental theology of the Church, this document inspired hope in the people since the Church really wanted to engage with the world in the light of the Gospel. The Church assured that it is not trying to shirk away from its basic responsibility to pave the way for

the reign of God as symbol and servant already in this world. Pope John Paul II, in his encyclicals *Laborem Exercens*, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, *Centëssimus Annus*, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, etc. follows the same structure and style as that of *Gaudium et Spes*. Basically he examined and analyzed the current situation of the world, evaluated this situation using the norm of the Gospel values and proposed guidelines for praxis of the Church. He did not hesitate to speak out unpleasant truths that really emerged from this procedure. This method of ‘analytically see – theologically judge- and pastorally act’ was already adopted by the ‘Catholic Action’ groups of the fifties and further developed by the political theologies of liberation. This method is clearly different from the traditional method of propounding the theological and ethical principles first, and then drawing up the list of applications from the theory. The latter method is not helpful to make use of the insights and findings of the social sciences productively in the theologising process as well as in shaping the pastoral programmes. Prior to the rise of the social sciences theology sought the help of philosophy only. But today we cannot fathom the human situation in all its complexities without having recourse to various social sciences.

3. The Significant Status of “Diaconia” in the Church

The most valuable discovery made in the second part is related to service of the seven deacons in the Church. The pope writes: “In other words, the social service which they [the seven deacons] were meant to provide was absolutely concrete, yet at the same time it was also a spiritual service; theirs was a truly spiritual office which carried out an essential responsibility of the Church, namely a well-ordered love of neighbour. With the formation of this group of seven, “diaconia” – the ministry of charity exercised in a communitarian, orderly way – became part of the fundamental structure of the Church” (n. 21). When the seven deacons were appointed and entrusted with the responsibility of social service, they and their activities were being recognized as spiritual ministry. The pope affirms that the threefold task of the Church consists of kerygma, leitourgia and diaconia. He admonishes us that charitable action is a duty ensuing from the essential nature of the Church (no.29), and it must never be seen as a mere means for religious conversion. “Love is free; it is not practised as a way of achieving other ends” (no. 31c). Further, he

reminds us that we must restrain ourselves from showing undue haste in the direct proclamation of the Gospel. "A Christian knows when it is time to speak of God and when it is better to say nothing and to let love alone speak. He knows that God is love (cf. I Jn 4,8) and that God's presence is felt at the very time when the only thing we do is to love" (no.31c). The ecclesial dimension of charitable service of the faithful is also duly emphasised. "... the true subject of the various Catholic organisations that carry out a ministry of charity is the Church itself – at all levels, from the parishes, through the particular Churches, to the universal Church. ... and it is emphasized that the exercise of charity is an action of the Church as such, and that, like the ministry of Word and Sacrament, it too has been an essential part of her mission from the very beginning" (no. 32).

4. Political action, Social Justice and 'Caritas'

"Love – caritas – will always prove necessary, even in the most just society. There is no ordering of the State so just that it can eliminate the need for a service of love." (no.28b), declares the pope. However, he speaks of a division of duties in this regard. The pope declares crisply, "The just ordering of the society and the State is a central responsibility of politics" (no.28a). Here he sticks to the Augustinian distinction between Church and State, without denying the necessary interrelation between the two. "We do not need a State which regulates and controls everything, but a State which, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, generously acknowledges and supports initiatives arising from the different social forces and combines spontaneity with closeness to those in need. The Church is one of those living forces: she is alive with the love enkindled by the Spirit of Christ" (no.28b). He asserts that the origin, goal and criterion of a nation is justice. Justice, in its very nature, is intimately related to morality and practical reason. Reason, for its proper functioning, must constantly be subjected to purification. For, the delusive influence of power and selfish interests can render reason blind to morality. It is here that the Church can play her role. "The Church cannot and must not take upon herself the political battle to bring about the most just society possible. She cannot and must not replace the State. Yet at the same time she cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice. She has to play her part through rational argument and she has to reawaken the spiritual

energy without which justice, which always demands sacrifice, cannot prevail and prosper. A just society must be the achievement of politics, not of the Church. Yet the promotion of justice through efforts to bring about openness of mind and will to the demands of the common good is something which concerns the Church deeply” (no. 28a). Such clear separation of duty and distancing from the affair of the state is a deviation from the vision of pope Paul VI and that of pope John Paul II. Quoting *Quadragesimo Anno* of Paul VI, John Paul II teaches that to offer ‘principles for reflection’, ‘criteria of judgment’ and ‘directives for action’ is the bounden duty of the Church deriving from its very nature. “In consequence, when the Church concerns herself with the ‘development of peoples’, she cannot be accused of going outside her own specific field of competence and, still less, outside the mandate received from the Lord” (SRS no. 8), affirmed pope John Paul II.

Assimilating and utilizing the insights of modern social and economic sciences, John Paul II made an extensive analysis of the contemporary world in his encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*. He enumerates the deep seated reasons for today’s sorry state of affairs as follows (SRS nos. 11-26): (i) Grave dereliction of duty on the part of the economic and political authorities of the developing nations. (ii) The unwillingness of the rich nations to help the poor nations. (iii) The present socio-economic mechanisms have spawn islands of affluence and ghettos of poverty as well as their concomitant homelessness and unemployment. (iv) The liberal capitalism of the West and the collectivist Marxism of the East that vie with each other for global supremacy have deepened the wedge between the two blocs. (v). War, arms production cum sale, piling up of nuclear weapons, terrorism, etc., threaten and throttle peace and progress of humanity.

Besides conscientization and spiritual animation, the Church is duty-bound to intervene effectively in society to ensure justice and peace, affirms pope John Paul II. “Furthermore, the concept of faith makes quite clear the reasons which impel the Church to concern herself with the problems of development, to consider them a duty of her pastoral ministry, and to urge all to think about the nature and characteristics of authentic human development. Through her commitment she desires, on the one hand, to place herself at the

service of the divine plan which is meant to order all things to the fullness which dwells in Christ and which he communicated to his body; and on the other hand she desires to respond to her fundamental vocation of being a 'sacrament', that is to say 'a sign and instrument of intimate union with God and of the unity of the whole human race'. ... Thus, part of the teaching and most ancient practice of the Church is her conviction that she is obliged by her vocation – she herself, her ministers and each of her members – to relieve the misery of the suffering, both far and near, not only out of her 'abundance' but also out of her 'necessities'." (SRS no. 31) Continuing his reflection pope John Paul II finds a link between the concern for the suffering person and the liturgical celebrations, wherein we can find the inspiration from the prophets and the liberation theology. He writes, "Faced by cases of need, one cannot ignore them in favour of superfluous church ornaments and costly furnishing for divine worship; on the contrary it could be obligatory to sell these goods in order to provide food, drink, clothing and shelter for those who lack these things" (ibid).

In *Populorum Progressio* pope Paul VI wrote: "It is not just a matter of eliminating hunger, nor even of reducing poverty. The struggle against destitution, though urgent and necessary, is not enough. It is a question, rather, of building a world where every man, no matter what his race, religion or nationality, can live a fully human life, freed from servitude imposed on him by other men or by natural forces over which he has not sufficient control; a world where freedom is not an empty word and where the poor man Lazarus can sit down at the same table with the rich man" (PP.no. 47). In the post-synodal statement of Vatican in 1971 "Justice in the World", we read: Christian charity and justice can not be separated because charity contains justice. The fullness of justice is in charity" (no. 34). Charitable deeds must not silence human cry for justice. In the words of Blessed Padre Alberto Hurtado, a renowned social worker in Chile, "Marx declared that religion is the opium of the people, however I know that charity is the opium of the rich". The lived experience of numerous missionaries do not bear out the strict distinction made on paper between 'evangelization and spiritual ministry' on the one side and 'social ministry' on the other.

5. Against Marxism (and Liberal Capitalism)

Pope Benedict XVI views Marxism is “an inhuman philosophy”, which justifies and promotes a system in which “the people of the present are sacrificed to the moloch of the future, the realization of which is at best doubtful” (no.31b). The Marxist position that charitable deeds make oppressive structures appear less oppressive and thus perpetuate the status quo is decried by the pope. He rejects the Marxist criticism of charity as serving to blunt the struggles for a just and liberated society and perceives in it an attack on the services of the Church. In comparison with the encyclicals of his predecessors this observation is a case of oversimplification. Moreover, the pope, who makes a stringent criticism against Marxism, maintains silence, unlike his predecessors, against the injustice perpetuated by the adherents of liberal capitalism. Both pope Paul VI and pope John Paul II certainly did not pull any punches when it came to criticising collectivist Marxism as well as liberal capitalism. A few citations will elucidate the point. “But it is unfortunate that on these new conditions of society a system has been constructed which considers profit as the key motive for economic progress, competition as the supreme law of economics, and private ownership of the means of production as an absolute right that has no limits and carries no corresponding obligation. This unchecked liberalism leads to dictatorship rightly denounced by Pius XI as producing ‘the international imperialism of money’. One cannot condemn such abuses too strongly by solemnly recalling once again, that the economy is at the service of man” (PP no.26). In the encyclical on Labour pope John Paul II too condemns in the strongest terms the liberal capitalism that upholds the right to private property as an absolute right. “Christian tradition has never upheld this right [right to property] as absolute and untouchable. On the contrary, it has always understood this right within the broader context, the right common to all to use the goods of the whole creation: the right to private property is subordinated to the right to common use, to the fact that goods are meant for everyone. ... in consideration of human labour and of common access to the goods meant for man, one cannot exclude the *socialization*, in suitable conditions, of certain means of production.” (LE no.14). In his encyclical Centessimus Annus the same pope points out the liberal capitalism is still exerting its influence even today. “These are situations

in which the rules of the earliest period of capitalism still flourish in conditions of "ruthlessness" in no way inferior to the darkest moments of the first phase of industrialization. In other cases the land is still the central element in the economic process, but those who cultivate it are excluded from ownership and are reduced to a state of quasi-servitude. In these cases, it is still possible today, as in the days of *Rerum Novarum*, to speak of inhuman exploitation. In spite of the great changes which have taken place in the more advanced societies, the human inadequacies of capitalism and the resulting domination of things over people are far from disappearing" (CA no. 33). The capitalist and socialist systems are objectively and pragmatically analysed in this encyclical and the pope proposes an ethically acceptable position. "[In this sense,] it is right to speak of a struggle against an economic system, if the latter is understood as a method of upholding the absolute predominance of capital, the possession of the means of production and of the land, in contrast to the free and personal nature of human work. In the struggle against such a system, what is being proposed as an alternative is not the socialist system, which in fact turns out to be state capitalism, but rather a society of free work of enterprise and of participation. Such a society is not directed against the market, but demands that the market be appropriately controlled by the forces of society and by the State, so as to guarantee that the basic needs of the whole of society are satisfied." (CA 35). What is significant here is that pope John Paul II had been a personal witness to the atrocities of Socialist regime in his home country and he was well acquainted with the capitalist system of western Europe. Although the pope does not propose a via medium between the two systems, viz. liberal capitalism and collectivist socialism (SRS n.41), he is evidently concerned about the priority of labour over capital and the rights of the workers. In CA we read: "Furthermore, society and the State must ensure wage levels adequate for the maintenance of the worker and his family, including a certain amount for savings. This requires a continuous effort to improve workers' training and capability so that their work will be more skilled and productive, as well as careful controls and adequate legislative measures to block shameful forms of exploitation, especially to the disadvantage of the most vulnerable workers, of immigrants and of those on the margins of society. The role of trade unions in negotiating

minimum salaries and working conditions is decisive in this area. Finally, "humane" working hours and adequate free-time need to be guaranteed, as well as the right to express one's own personality at the workplace without suffering any affront to one's conscience or personal dignity. This is the place to mention once more the role of trade unions, not only in negotiating contracts, but also as "places" where workers can express themselves. They serve the development of an authentic culture of work and help workers to share in a fully human way in the life of their place of employment" (CA no.15).

6. Limitations of an Individualistic Approach

In the section "Those responsible for the Church's charitable activity" (nos. 32-39), pope exhorts the faithful to be actively involved in charitable service by joining various ecclesial organizations and collaborating with other organizations. They are required to have, according to the pope, a willingness to have openness to the Spirit, humility, serviceability, piety and faith as qualities. The emphasis falls on an individualistic approach. But in SRS we read: "The obligation to commit oneself to the development of peoples is not just an individual duty, and still less an individualistic one, as if it were possible to achieve this development through isolated efforts of each individual" (SRS no.32). The in-depth analysis of the sinful structures treated in this encyclical is very significant in this context. In the words of pope John Paul II, "It is important to note therefore that a world which is divided into blocs, sustained by rigid ideologies, and in which instead of interdependence and solidarity different forms of imperialism hold sway, can only be a world subject to structures of sin. ... 'Sin' and 'structures of sin' are categories which are seldom applied to the situation of the contemporary world. However one cannot easily gain a profound understanding of the reality that confronts us unless we give a name to the root of the evils which afflict us" (SRS no.36). Selfishness, greed for power and money, etc., affect the moral life negatively. To grasp the real nature of sin and to tackle it, we need to recognize the moral evil that is the root cause of this vicious circle of personal sin and social sin. In order to overcome this situation pope John Paul II speaks of the need of interdependence and solidarity. "This then is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to

commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are *all* really responsible *for all*" (SRS no. 38). The liberation movement and its positive and negative aspects are discussed in the encyclical. He states: "It is fitting to add that the aspiration to freedom from all forms of slavery affecting the individual and society is something noble and legitimate. This fact is the purpose of development or rather liberation and development, taking into account the intimate connection between the two" (SRS no. 46). It is this social dimension in analysis as well as reflection and guidelines, that we miss in the present encyclical under study. In today's sick world, our charity must be founded on justice and solidarity, if it has to be effective and complete.

7. Conclusion

Pope Benedict XVI sums up all his reflections on love in the words of St. Paul's hymn to charity, which he describes as the *magna carta* of all ecclesial service (no. 34). 'If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have love, I gain nothing' (I Cor 13,3). Beyond doubt, the encyclical is rich with a lot of insights and will serve as an inspiration to the faithful to engage in charitable activities, the core of Christian life. However we can not be oblivious of the differences in content, approach and emphasis between the present encyclical 'Deus Caritas Est' and those of the former popes. Let us hope that our pope will give us further exhortations that will help us to analyse the intricacies in the socio-economic and political spheres, to evaluate the immorality in international alliances, neo-colonial structures and governments anchored in left-right ideologies, and to inspire the Church, the servant of the Reign of God, to be in solidarity with the victims of the lop-sided developmental policies of the sinful structures.

Capuchin Vidyabhavan

Thellakom

In Defense of Eros

Mathew Illathuparampil

Eros has been vilified by many in Christian theological reflections as egocentric and acquisitive desire. Contrary to this common stance, *Deus Caritas est* tries to redeem the pristine Christian meaning of eros. Building on the crucial insight of the pope that eros and agape are two dimensions of the same love, this essay tries to make a theological defense of eros. The author argues that a proper rehabilitation of eros into theological discussions on Christian love will bring in fresh approaches toward marriage, sexuality, affective life and spirituality. The author is Dr. Mathew Illathuparampil who teaches moral theology at St. Joseph Pontifical Seminary, Mangalapuzha, Aluva.

Both as a principle and virtue, love occupies the heart of Christian praxis. It commands a respectable place in theological discourse as well. But love is so variegated in actual expressions that the demands of love might seem often vague and sometimes mutually conflicting. Love of neighbor, love of enemies, love of nature, love of God and self-love are a few among the different versions of what we call love. Greek thought categorized love into three, namely, agape, philia and eros. Agape was explained as selfless love; philia was usually understood in terms of love between friends. Most of dominant philosophical and theological traditions reduced eros to sexual love. For many, sexuality was vulgar and not a worthy candidate for virtue. Sexuality was found justification (only) in procreation. For example, Plato's *Symposium* praised courage, education, and wisdom as the virtues of love, but they had little to say of the virtues of sexuality. Eros was deemed as self love and the self indulgence of desire. It was thought to be possessive, jealous, obsessive, antisocial and even "mad."

In many prominent Christian appraisals of love, eros received not a respectable or exciting welcome. Eros meant the human experience of love as passionate desire, often associated with sexuality. This term scarcely appears in the bible. Eros appears only twice, in the book of Proverbs 7: 18 and 30: 16. Both suggest disordered sexual desire. The New Testament opts for agape which means a kind of benevolent generosity. One can understand this depreciation of eros in the dominant Christian approaches thanks to the proximity of eros to sexual meaning. Charity, devotion, and chastity were praised as virtues of Christian love, but the joys of sexuality were not counted among the virtuous states. Let us recall the classic seventeenth century preface: "Let virtue be rewarded, vice be punished, and chastity treated as it deserves." However, though not in a predominant way, erotic love was legitimized as the metaphysical ground of sexual desire, the motivation for marriage, and the equalization of the sexes. In any case, the most scathing criticism of the allegedly Christian devaluation of eros was made by Friedrich Nietzsche in his book, *Beyond Good and Evil*: "Christianity gave Eros poison to drink; it did not die of it; to be sure, it degenerated into a vice."¹ He held that the concept of eros was sickened by Christianity.

As suggested above, agape and eros stand in opposite poles, according to traditional descriptions of love. Agape was generally understood as self-sacrificing love and the latter was explained primarily as self-fulfilling love. This distinction was further confirmed and explained by Anders Nygren in his famous work, *Eros and Agape* published originally during 1930-1936. He reasoned that agape is God's freely given love. It is sacrificial giving. Eros is the possessive and calculative love. He counted philia a subset of eros.² One may sense the presence of Lutheran theology of justification by faith alone, in the work of Nygren who was a bishop in his religious vocation.

Given this much celebrated polarity between eros and agape, the position of *Deus Caritas est* (hereafter abbreviated as DCE), the first encyclical of pope Benedict XVI strikes a differing note. He

- 1 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Jenseits und Böse: Zur Genealogie der Moral* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999) 102. It is remarkable that Benedict XVI cites this allegation of Nietzsche (DCE 3).
- 2 Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, rev. trans. in one vol., trans., P. Watson (London: SPCK, 1982) 210.

argues convincingly that eros and agape are two expressions of the same love. This is a significant theological contribution of this magisterial document. This claim is remarkable on many counts. It redeems one of the originally bright ideas of Christianity which came to be clouded by murky reflections on sexuality. It denies the claim that genuine love has not much to do with emotions and bodiliness. It suggests how eros can come close(r) to love of God. Given these rich theological prospects and in line with the initiative made by DCE, this essay tries to offer a theological defense of eros.

In this attempt to give a much wanted theological tribute to eros, I mean to do three things. First, I shall briefly summarize the reflections of Benedict XVI on the unity between eros and agape. Secondly, I shall make a brief theological justification of eros. Thirdly, this essay seeks to expose fresh theological and moral concerns stemming from eros-agape unity.

1. Eros-Agape Unity

In his encyclical the pope redeems a much forgotten Christian tradition about eros-agape unity. Benedict XVI is not the first to conceive agape and eros as two expressions of the same love. The first author in Christian tradition to have linked eros with agape is Origen. In his prologue to the commentary on the "Song of Songs" he says that eros can be substituted for agape, in John's statement that 'God is love.' Gregory of Nyssa, in his *Homily* xiii, holds that eros is intensified agape. Dionysius the Areopagate claims that in certain respects eros is more divine than agape.³ Maximus the Confessor continued to hold the same opinion.⁴ Augustine remarked that some people object to think of God's love in terms of eros. But that is not warranted.⁵

Benedict XVI briefly outlines the genesis of the meaning of eros in Greek philosophical context. He rightly says that the Greeks called the love between man and woman *eros*, which is often imposed on them. It suggests that eros is more spontaneous and less willed by individuals. He points out that the New Testament does not at all use the word eros. Rather, it prefers agape, suggesting a distinct vision of

3 *Divine Names*, ch. 4.

4 *Scholia in lib. de divinis nominibus*, ch. 4 # 12, 15.

5 *City of God*, bk. XIV, ch. 7.

love (DCE 3).⁶ This raises an important question whether Christianity rejects *eros* with its joy and passion. DCE rejects this rejection and the supposed opposition between *eros* and *agape*.

While showing the due place of *eros* in Christian thought, the pope tries to figure out the reasons for the apparent Christian devaluation of *eros*. It has to do more with the extreme glorification of *eros* in pagan thought and religious practices. "In the religions, this attitude found expression in fertility cults, part of which was the "sacred" prostitution which flourished in many temples. *Eros* was thus celebrated as divine power, as fellowship with the Divine. The Old Testament firmly opposed this form of religion, which represents a powerful temptation against monotheistic faith, combating it as a perversion of religiosity. But it in no way rejected *eros* as such; rather, it declared war on a warped and destructive form of it, because this counterfeit divinization of *eros* actually strips it of its dignity and dehumanizes it" (DCE 4).

Reviewing the apparent polarity between *agape* and *eros* Benedict XVI writes: "Yet *eros* and *agape*—ascending love and descending love—can never be completely separated. The more the two, in their different aspects, find a proper unity in the one reality of love, the more the true nature of love in general is realized" (DCE 7). He explains that *eros* has been taken as covetous and ascending, a fascination for the great promise of happiness, in drawing near to the other. As *eros* matures, the pope claims, it becomes less and less concerned with itself, increasingly seeks the happiness of the other, is concerned more and more with the beloved. Thus the element of *agape* enters into this love. Otherwise *eros* will be impoverished. Similarly, human being cannot live by oblation, descending, *agapeic* love alone. "He cannot always give, he must also receive. Anyone who wishes to give love must also receive love as a gift" (DCE 7).

6 Differing from the assumption of the pope one may ask whether the use of *agape* in the New Testament is due to any theological motive or to the natural evolution of the Greek language. More objective scholarship favors the latter view. For more details and the use of *philia* and *agape* in the New Testament see Liz Carmichael, *Friendship: Interpreting Christian Love* (London: T & T Clark, 2004) 36-39. We cannot miss the fact that the New Testament uses *philein* and *agapan* interchangeably: those who 'love' (*agapan*) front seats at Lk 11: 43 but *philein* at Mt 23: 6.

The above made claims of Benedict XVI affirm emphatically that all forms of love are basically one. Although Anders Nygren is not mentioned, the argument is clearly counter to his pitting of *eros* against *agape*. Nor does the pope mention C.S. Lewis who is famous for his description of the “four loves.” But Benedict’s argument is at odds with Lewis’ claims. The pope argues that all love is one because the Trinitarian God is one, and God is love. He affirms that *eros* and *agape* are inseparable. They cannot be set against each other. Erotic love in its original impulse is willed by God. Even when it is degenerate, it does not lose its divine lifeblood. It is good to recall that in his commentary on the “Song of Songs” William of St. Thierry wrote: “*O amor, a quo omnis amor congnominatur etiam carnalis ac degener*” (O love which remains love even when it becomes completely degenerate).

Confirming further the *agape-eros* unity Benedict XVI says, “We have seen that God’s *eros* for man is also totally *agape*. This is not only because it is bestowed in a completely gratuitous manner, without any previous merit, but also because it is love which forgives” (DCE 10). It is a daring step to speak about the *eros* of God by pope. God does not love people to annul them in his love, but to make them fruitful and allow others to recognize the love of the Trinity in them. There is “a certain relationship between love and the divine” to the extent love “promises infinity, eternity—a reality far greater and totally other than our everyday existence” (DCE 5).

In addition to establishing the *agape-eros* unity, the pope spares no chance to highlight the due glory of *eros*. The paradigm for every form of love is suggested by the Pope: the love that can arise from the amorous encounter between a man and a woman. “Love between man and woman, where body and soul are inseparably joined. This would be “the epitome of love” (DCE 2). It is remarkable that he concentrates on this form of love to study the nature of love. That is why the nuptial mystery is highly emphasized. Spousal imagery shows how there can be a genuine unity, while the two partners keep their integrity intact. DCE (8) teaches that the experience of falling in love is the most important natural means with which God has endowed us to learn the way of love. Such an erotic movement in a person allows (draws) him/her to the irresistible promise of happiness disclosed by the other. It leads one to love the other for the sake of the other.

"Fundamentally love is a single reality, but with different dimensions; at different times, one or other dimension may emerge more clearly. Yet when the two dimensions are totally cut off from one another, the result is a caricature or at least an impoverished form of love" (DCE 8). It does not mean that we have to balance the desire of eros with the generosity of agape. Rather it means that desire is not truly desire unless it is generous or generosity is not truly generous unless it is filled with desire.⁷

The pope holds that eros is the "pinnacle of our existence" and "the most precious thing in life." One can easily approve this, especially in Platonic terms, because ultimately eros is the way by which human beings respond to goodness and beauty (*Phaedrus* 249c-252b). In this sense one cannot identify sexuality with eros. The latter is more universal and comprehensive desire. Sexuality is the physical image of eros. It is to protect the integral significance of eros that Christianity opposes the reduction of love to its mere physical expressions.⁸ However, we cannot vilify eros. For, it amounts to downplaying the value of the greatest of human aspirations. Unless we deem human nature basically evil, we cannot vilify eros. For eros is based on, and part of, essential human nature.

II. Theological Justification of Eros

Benedict XVI in DCE tries to regain the lost glory of eros. It seems that we can further confirm the claims of the pope in the light of Christian theological tradition. The objective of this section is to illustrate that, according to unadulterated Christian view regarding love, eros commands respect in human life and theological vision. Eros becomes theologically well placed, when it can be justified in terms of God's love for us and the world at large.

As we have already noted, the approach of the pope stands against all reductionistic tendencies towards love. He tries to maintain the integrity of love. Eros and agape cannot be mutually exclusive and alien. On the one hand, if Christianity has only to repeat the Greek concept of eros, then it would become that Christianity has nothing new to offer. On the other hand, if the Christian view of love as

7 D. C. Shindler, "The Redemption of *Eros*: Philosophical Reflections on Benedict XVI's First Encyclical," *Communio* 33 (Fall 2006) 379.

8 D. C. Shindler, "The Redemption of *Eros*," 381.

agape is so fresh and unique, it may look unnatural and strange. So blending these two aspects of love, in eros-agape unity the pope argues that grace perfects nature. Human love moves towards human perfection. It means that eros contained in human nature is not evil in itself.

DCE says that God's love is eros. The very question whether God's love is erotic or agapeic arises from the false and sterile dichotomies popularized by Anders Nygren. At Sinai God declares his possessive love: I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God (Ex. 20: 5). This yearning of God is erotic. It is consummated in Incarnation when the Son assumes flesh and transfigures it as a spiritual yearning without ceasing to be erotic. Eros is the love by which God loves human beings. It is the desire that yearns for union with the other. It is God's *philanthropia*. We may recall what Gregory of Nyssa has said: Eros flowers into agape and love of neighbor. "Eros is the intensity of Agape."⁹ He continues: "Agape which is aroused is called Eros."¹⁰ Divinity does not need to need and yearn, but God chooses to take on the need of flesh, as part of God's humanity in Jesus. Thus God becomes a jealous lover (Ex. 34: 14). That is why God makes a covenant with human beings.

Covenant is as important a notion as creation in theology. Creation is the external basis of the covenant, the covenant the internal basis of creation. Dwelling on this insight, Karl Barth analogizes marriage covenant with divine-human covenant. The one flesh "has its frontiers in a very different beginning and end, where Yahweh and His people are together 'one flesh.'"¹¹ He continues, "Love and marriage become to them in some sense irresistibly a parable and sign of the link which Yahweh has established between Himself and His people, which in His eternal faithfulness He has determined to keep, and which He for His part has continually renewed."¹² Barth thinks of God's love as the primary analogate and human love as the secondary: "Because

9 "Epitetamene agape eros legetai." Gregory of Nyssa, Homily 13, "In Canticum canticorum, PG 44: 1048c.

10 Gregory of Nyssa, *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, Homily 13 (Brookline, MA.: Hellenic College Press, 1987) 234.

11 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/1, 315.

12 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/1, 315.

the election of God is real, there is such a thing as love and marriage."¹³ This is an oft repeated and revealing statement of Barth.

If we posit the Trinitarian love as the primary analogate, eros and all other distinctions of love become derivative. In Lk 3: 21 the Father announces that he is well pleased with the Son. When the Father raises the Son, it is a vindication of a love that he had for the Son from eternity. The Son's love for humanity is an eros which ends in goodness, righteousness and the fulfillment of the Trinitarian life. In this sense the erotic is a subset of the love of the Son for humans for which the Father loves the Son.

There is further scope for eros in theological discussions. God does not leave human body out of God's desire for human beings. Humans want to be wanted. Sexual desire is a bodily manifestation of my desire to be wanted. It can be satisfied fully only in God's desire for me. God can use my sexual desire (or even body) in two ways to teach me that God loves me: directly, God's use of my body causes me to understand God's love, when He poses a community as the focus of my affection. Then I take up the vocation of a monk teaching the community that God loves it. The same thing happens indirectly, when God's use of my body causes me to understand God's love through one focus of affection in marriage. Then I take up the vocation of serving the community to teach God's love through marriage.¹⁴ "What the monks attain *directly*, the spouses work out *indirectly*, and their *means* is the sacramental sphere of grace. The one through the other they look at Christ."¹⁵

The human body locates the accessibility of the other for eros or passionate desire. They being embodied creatures, human beings enjoy (suffer) concupiscence. Negatively it is (sinful) sexual appetites or more broadly it is the yearning humans have for others. It is where humans become vulnerable to the neighbor. For they experience their incompleteness in themselves.¹⁶ It is remarkable that there was also

13 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/1, 318.

14 Eugene F. Rogers, *Sexuality and the Christian Body* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999) 83.

15 Paul Evdokimov, *The Sacrament of Love* (Crestwood, New York: S. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995) 114.

16 Karl Rahner, "The Theological Concept of Concupiscence," *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 1 (Baltimore: Helcon Press, 1961) 347-382.

a positive appreciation of human body and sexuality even among the medieval monks. Peter Brown holds that "sexual desire was ... treated as effectively coextensive with human nature."¹⁷ Medieval theology maintained that God could save human beings only by becoming a human being, not becoming an angel.¹⁸ Since angels had no body, they had no concupiscence, either. It was an ancient Christian slogan that what was not assumed is not redeemed. In this context we may ask what does then mortification of eros mean. Positively, in the word of Evdokimov, it is not renunciation of the self but total self-acceptance.¹⁹ In celibacy desires are not repressed, called sin or rejected. They are to be taken, assumed into the love of God for us and us for God.

We might be surprised to find that an erotic model of the love of God existed during the Middle Ages. "The reason why the erotic model of the love of God so appealed to the monastic commentator of the middle ages—and the vast majority of these commentators were monks—had to do with very fundamental preoccupations of the monastic theologian... rooted in the monk's theological eschatology, in their sense that their life of partial withdrawal from the world situated them at a point of intersection between this world and the next, ... between anticipation and fulfillment. This meant that the concept of love as "yearning" or "longing"—as an *amor-desiderium*, or, in Greek, *Eros*, exactly expressed what they wanted by way of a language of love."²⁰

III. Theological Implications of Eros-Agape Unity

As we have seen already, DCE emphatically affirms eros-agape unity. Now the most important question arises: what does it imply for Christian theology and practice? This section tries to address this question. The encyclical on its part suggests some implications of this esteemed unity. For example, it says, there is a close connection between eros and marriage in the bible (DCE 11).²¹ However, this is

17 Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1988) 230.

18 Anselm of Canterbury, *Why God Became Man*, Bk, II, Ch. 21.

19 Paul Evdokimov, *The Sacrament of Love*, 100.

20 Denys Turner, *Eros and Allegory: Medieval Exegesis of the Song of Songs* (Kalamazoo, MI.: Cistercian Pub., 1995) 20.

21 But in Plato's *Symposium* eros and marriage are placed as opposites.

not an unprecedented kind of argument. Human life and activities have been envisaged after the life and activities of God. Again as DCE says, "corresponding to the image of a monotheistic God is monogamous marriage" (DCE 11). In fact, it reveals the uniqueness of marriage.

Perhaps, the primary implication of eros-agape unity concerns itself with the meaning of human sexuality in view of God. Human sexuality is not about sexual techniques, nor exclusively about sexual intercourse. Sexual does not always mean copulative. As David M. Halperin writes, "Sexuality... turns out to be something more than an endogenous principle of motivation outwardly expressed by the performance of sexual acts; it is a mute power subtly and deviously at work throughout the wide range of human behaviors, attitudes, tastes, choices, gestures, styles, pursuits, judgment, and utterances. Sexuality is thus the inmost part of an individual human nature. It is the feature of a person that takes longest to get to know well, and knowing it renders transparent and intelligible to the knower the person to whom it belongs. Sexuality holds the key to unlocking the deepest mysteries of the human personality: it lies at the centre of the hermeneutics of the self."²²

There is more than one way of being sexual. Jürgen Moltmann holds that sexuality was often interpreted in impoverished and reductionistic ways in Christian perceptions. For example, he surveys the history of the interpretation of the Song of Songs: "A significant example of the way the one, single love has been split up into two different forms is the transferred, mystical interpretation of the Song of Solomon and its literal, erotic interpretation. Does this wonderful love song really have a place in a religious book? People who were bothered by this, interpreted the poem allegorically, claiming that it referred to the soul's love for God. By so doing they abstracted sensual love from the love of God and banished it to 'the lower instincts,' so that the transcendental love for God might be pure, spiritual, and confined to 'the heart.' But if the Bible is called—and rightly called—'the book of life,' then the life-giving experiences of love belong to this book, and in that case it is inadmissible to withdraw from this

22 David M. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality and Other Essays on Greek Love* (New York: Routledge, 1990) 26.

immanent experience of love its transcendent depths by abstracting from it a higher love. God—the quickening Spirit—can be experienced in the experience of human love. Even if his name is not explicitly mentioned in the Song of Solomon, his shining splendor radiates from every phrase with which the experience of love is described, for this experience is a ‘flame of the Lord’ (8:6). That is why the old Benedictine hymn maintains: ‘*Ubi caritas et amor, ibi Deus est*’—where love is, there is God.’²³

Sexuality might be described as how we communicate our desire for the other through our bodiliness. In this sense, it has to do with God’s story as well, namely as how “God desires us in creation and makes us desirable in redemption and sanctification.”²⁴ Reflections on sexuality have to begin with God, more precisely with the Trinitarian God. Love between persons in the Trinity is characterized by mutuality, indwelling and interdependence and exceeds into creation and redemption. The desire for union with others is a reflection of divine eros. If God is love (1Jn 4: 16), there is eros in God.

Sexuality has been in danger of being suppressed ascetically in favor of the spiritual or depreciated as inferior or demonic. Being an erotic or sexual person can have implications in view of our relation to God. “Sexuality is a figure or symbol of our ultimate destiny with God, because it is a search for the other. We feel that it is not good for us to be alone. We feel mysteriously incomplete, so all our life is a searching for a remembered unity we have never yet known. Sexuality is one of the modes of our search; it is both a symptom of our incompleteness and sign of our fulfillment. For the Christian, therefore, there are two ingredients in sexual experience. One is clearly a participation in the joy of God. We need not be afraid to rejoice in the pleasures of our bodily nature, but we must remember that these pleasures are the sign and seal of unity, relatedness, bondedness. For the Christian, sex should be part of a covenant between two persons, because it is a reflection or earthly representation of the covenant or marriage within the Godhead, and

23 Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation* (London: SCM, 1992) 260.

24 Stephen C. Barton, *Life Together: Family, Sexuality and Community in the New Testament and Today* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2001) 75.

it is a reflection of the covenant or marriage between God and his people and Christ and the Church."²⁵ From this description it becomes clear that what counts most important for sexuality is the intimacy between the spouses. They could be naked but not ashamed. "The one flesh of sexuality is defenseless flesh."²⁶ It does not need any defense.

The erotic union of man and woman in one flesh is a prophetic announcement of a greater mystery: the union of Christ and the Church (Eph. 5: 21-32). Sexual love between couples bears within it the greater love of Christ and the Church, of which the Holy Spirit is the nuptial bond and fecundity. It seems foolish to think about the love between couples without reference to God's love. For as Adrienne von Speyr argues, "The mutual love of husband and wife is on the one hand so wide that God alone can fill it, and on the other side so much the gift of grace that it bears with it the promise of fruitfulness, a promise which in fact remains entirely with God and is not in the hands of the parents."²⁷

Conjugal love where eros is expressed at best is a total and exclusive self-gift, akin to the self-gift of God. Pope Paul VI writes: "Conjugal love comprises a totality involving all aspects of the person—the call of the body and instinct, the force of emotion and affectivity, the aspiration of the spirit and the will; it aims at a profoundly personal unity, one which, beyond the union in one flesh, leads spouses to become one heart and one soul; it demands indissolubility and fidelity in the definitive reciprocal gift; and it opens into fruitfulness."²⁸ It is similar to God's self-gift. For total self gift, as in the case of God as well as in conjugal love, always is marked by a kenotic offering: "The personal coming together of the two self-emptying partners is only possible in terms of the third factor, which, —long before the arrival of the child—is that objective of the meeting of their two freedoms."²⁹

25 Richard Holloway, *Anger, Sex, Doubt and Death* (London: SPCK, 1992) 34-35.

26 Phyllis Trible, "A Love Story Gone Awry," *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978) 107.

27 Adrienne von Speyr, *The Word: A Meditation on the Prologue to St. John's Gospel* (New York: David McKay, 1953) 100.

28 Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, 9.

29 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology IV: Spirit and Institution* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1995) 218.

Self-gift is not simply an expression of a sentimental approach. It amounts to give the other one's time and life. It must become a covenant in the full sense of the term. According to Xavier Lacroix, the notion of the covenant implies death at least in four ways: 1. a commitment until death; 2. one dies to a former life while making a covenant; 3. breaking a covenant means dying to a significant part of oneself; 4. a covenant consists in fighting together against death and the forces of death. In covenant death is not the finality. It counterposes another finality namely, a commitment beyond the point of no return.³⁰ Now it becomes clear why the Song of Songs says (8:16) "love is as strong as death." Conjugal covenant and celibate covenant bear witness to the absolute love realized in Jesus Christ. The mystery of the covenant is expressed through nuptial imageries for Christ in the New Testament. He is described as the bridegroom (Mt 22: 1-10; 25: 1-12). John the Baptist calls him so (Jn. 3: 29); Jesus attributes this title to himself (Mt 9: 15). Similarly 2 Cor 11: 2; Eph. 5: 23-25; Rev. 19: 7; 22: 17-20 refer to this imagery. Isa 54: 5 says, "For your Maker is your husband." The OT has many references to the unfaithful bride (Hos. 2: 19-20; Jer. 31: 3; Is. 5: 1-7; Is. 62: 5).

Two baptized persons cannot separate their passionate desire for each other from the love of Christ. Evdokimov writes, "By the sacrament, *each couple espouses Christ*. This is why in loving one another the spouses love Christ."³¹ "The acts of faith of the two marriage partners meet in God and are accepted, formed and returned to them by God, in whom they find the foundation of their unity, the witness of their union and the pledge of their fidelity. It is God who, in the act of faith, gives the partners to one another in the basic Christian act of self-surrender. Together, they offer themselves to God and receive each other from him in a gift of grace, confidence and Christian expectation."³² This idea is cryptically put forward by C. Massabki: "Wishing to be one, Adam and Eve find that they are now three."³³ For they have become a community in which the presence

30 Xavier Lacroix, *Les mirages de l'amour* (Paris: Cerf, 1998) 216.

31 Paul Evdokimov, "Ecclesia domestica," *L'Anneau d'Or* 107 (1962) 358.

32 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Christian States of Life* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1983) 245.

33 C. Massabki, *Le Christ rencontre de deux l'amour* (Paris, 1958) 105.

of God resides. Almost the same idea is expressed by *Familiaris Consortio* (13) as follows: "conjugal love reaches that fullness to which it is interiorly ordained, conjugal charity, which is the proper and specific way in which the spouses participate in and are called to live the very charity of Christ who gave himself on the cross."

The reciprocal gift of the persons creates joy, for it contains God's gift, namely, the Holy Spirit. The Spirit, according to Balthasar is in himself "exuberance" and excess of love: "If from the beginning in the Father, God is already the marvel of love, in being himself in the gift, this marvel is accomplished in the Holy Spirit who precisely as excess of Love, in his being-always-more is the elusive and insurmountable summit of absolute love: Deus semper major not only for us, but in himself."³⁴

We may hold that the self-gift of spouses often faces the limitation of expressing it through gestures—words and deeds. But Christ in his offering was the gift himself. But faith and life in Christ would allow spouses to offer themselves as gifts. "The vocation to love is what essentially makes man the image of God."³⁵ M. Séguin explains it as follows: "According to the Pauline doctrine, the sexual relationship between two baptized spouses acquires a particular richness; it becomes not only the expression of the total and definitive gift that each makes of himself or herself to the other, but by the will of Christ, it becomes in some way the expression of the total and definitive gift of Christ to the Church, a concrete participation in Christ's love for the Church, an efficacious sign of the Lord's gift to the spouses: it becomes a sacrament.... Each of the spouses, giving his or her love and expressing it in his or her bodiliness, is a mediator of Christ's love for the other."³⁶

Eros, once genuinely understood and received in union with Christ, will expand the horizons of the couples. Eros in the said sense becomes agape. "If Christian spouses are able genuinely to make this act of

34 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theologik III: Der Geist der Wahrheit* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1987) 146.

35 Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, "Matrimonio e Famiglia nel piano di Dio," *La Familiaris Consortio* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1982) 78.

36 M. Séguin, *La contraception et L'Eglise: Bilan et prospective* (Montreal: Paulines, 1994) 157.

perfect self-giving, their limited community is opened to the universality of the Catholic Church, and their love, which seems to be focused on so narrow a circle, is enabled actively to participate in the realization of the kingdom of God upon earth."³⁷

How to explain theologically genital sex and fecundity in terms of eros? Perhaps, the best expression to convey the theological meaning of eros with regard to genital sex could be nuptiality. The nuptial meaning of human self means that we are made to find happiness, fulfillment and completeness as a person in some sort of nuptial intimacy. It means that whether we are celibate or married, our encounters, relationships are to be marital, not genital, involving the complementarity of sexes. It can be called nuptial in the sense of special intimacy expressed most vividly between husband and wife.³⁸ What is it that specifies nuptial intimacy? It is the self-abandonment which is dramatically experienced at the moment of orgasm. We fail to live out the nuptial meaning of our bodies, when we fail to enjoy communion with others. The vocations of marriage and celibacy are basically the same. They strive to achieve nuptial intimacy with every person we meet with passionate and self-abandoning love.³⁹

Genital sex is a sacrament or instrument of grace, not an obstacle to it. "Sexual intercourse, then, is the body language *par excellence* of generous, altruistic love and of the intimacy, the passionate, ecstatic, altruistic communion that such love produces."⁴⁰ It is more sensible to say that "Sexual love is death and resurrection—a death to our single, private selves, and a resurrection to new life in our coupled selves. And that dying and rising is precisely the sacramental power of matrimony. Sexual desire is a powerful interior impulse, the grace of a vocation to be other-centered rather than self-centered."⁴¹ If this stance is taken seriously, sexual passion can be made the centre of the spiritual life of married people. Married life is not a life of

37 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Christian States of Life* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1983) 248-249.

38 Charles Gallagher, et al., *Embodied in Love: Sacramental Spirituality and Sexual Intimacy* (New York: Crossroad, 1984) 23.

39 Charles Gallagher, et al., *Embodied in Love*, 24.

40 Charles Gallagher, et al., *Embodied in Love*, 33.

41 Charles Gallagher, et al., *Embodied in Love*, 47.

sharing common tasks or attending to mutual needs alone. It is a life of complete giving and receiving each other's selves. At this level, the spouses share in the kind of Trinitarian life of the three persons.

Passionate love is never sterile. But fecundity need not always be biological, especially in the case of celibate people. The gift of fertility establishes an immediate relationship with God. "Adam can beget offspring 'in his own likeness, after his image' (Gen 5: 3), but when Eve holds her first-born son in her arms, she cries: 'I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord' (Gen 4: 1). She understands that the human child is not a mere gift of nature but a personal gift of God."⁴² What about infertile couples? Every Christian marriage is blessed by God and is fruitful in him. But in the case of those who are not blessed with children, they are given the blessing of sacrifice. In their case, "the spiritual fruitfulness of marriage is increased and widened out invisibly so that it flows into the whole community."⁴³ Why not call it as the fecundity of the cross?

Conjugal love consecrated to Christ receives a participation in the fecundity of the cross. "This gift of self in life and death is not unlike the ineradicable, eternal vow that is immanent in all love; it is an act of such finality that it resembles a true 'loss of one's own soul' (Mt 16: 25). Only because he has sacrificed the right to dispose of its life as it wills can the right so to dispose of the body also be sacrificed: 'The wife has not authority over her body, but the husband; the husband likewise has not authority over his body, but the wife' (I Cor 7: 4)."⁴⁴ It is insightful that Thomas compares the parental duty of educating children to priestly ministry. "Some only propagate and guard spiritual life by a spiritual ministry: this is the role of *Orders*; others do this for both corporal and spiritual life, and this is brought about by the sacrament of marriage, by which a man and a woman join in order to beget offspring and bring them up to worship God."⁴⁵

Conclusions

In the light of these discussions on eros-agape unity in the light of DCE, we may draw a few conclusions. First of all, it is true that

42 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, Vol. II, 372.

43 Adrienne von Speyr, *The Word: A Meditation on the Prologue to St. John's Gospel* (New York: David McKay, 1953) 101.

44 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Christian States of Life*, 245.

many people tend to present selflessness as the ideal love. It is questionable whether one can love others without any personal stint. Love always presumes concern, care and emotional backing. Love is not morbid other-orientedness. The Latin word *Caritas* evolves from the root *Carus* which means dear, valuable, etc. To hold Christian love as devoid of emotional personal involvement is defective.

Secondly, the claim that God is love means that God desires us and the world at large. In this sense, we may say that God is eros. Benedict XVI cites (DCE 9) pseudo-Dionysius to affirm that God is eros. It is one of the revolutionary ideas in Christian thought. However, the depth and demands of this idea seem to have been less explored. There are many examples in the Scriptures which link desires of eros with God. Prophets Hosea (2: 2-22), Jeremiah (31: 3) and Isaiah (5: 1-7, 54: 5, 62: 5) attribute images of nuptial love to divine love. The New Testament which presents Jesus as the bridegroom (Mt 22: 1-10) also seems to do the same thing. In this context the "Song of Songs" deserves much more respectable treatment and interpretation.⁴⁶ The summit of the spousal tradition is found in the "Song of Songs." In this book love is celebrated for the sake of love in a unique way. It is very significant that unlike in many other texts here the woman also falls in love with such intensity and clarity to say "let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth." According to Balthasar, the song celebrates only one thing: "the beautiful, resplendent, and awesome glory of the *eros* between man and woman."⁴⁷ He continues, "*Eros* hovers freely about its own house, without any other purpose than loving and being loved: nowhere is there talk of marriage, or indeed of children;" "*eros* is self-sufficient" in its dreamed-of and desired existence, detached from the historical circumstances of sin and guilt; "this is supralapsarian *eros*, as it were."⁴⁸

45 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* IV, 58. (FC 38 also)

46 In the wake of Origen, it was interpreted mostly allegorically, but he seems to have presupposed the literal. Origen, "The First Homily," *The Song of Songs: Commentaries and Homilies*, vol. 23, Ancient Christian Writers (New York: Paulist, 1992) 269.

47 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, Vol. VI: *Theology of the Old Covenant* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991) 131.

48 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, 131-133.

Thirdly, there is no necessary incompatibility between emotionally charged love and spiritual life. There is ample room for warm relationships in spiritual life. While sharing desirous love with one another, men and women are sharing Christ's love. For example, John Chrysostom claims that sexual union allows the spouses to participate in the love of God, because "they are exactly like Jesus Christ who, united to his bride the Church, was not less one with the Father."⁴⁹ One may claim that it is precisely on account of their marriage that the spouses participate in the Trinitarian love of God for God. Close relationships and warm friendships need not deter one from his/her spiritual life. Rather they can serve as occasions to experience God's love. This may lead to another question, namely, whether total love of God will allow space for other loves and likings. Should one relinquish all other loves in order to love God totally? Christian spiritual tradition seems to have struggled with questions of this sort. Many answers have been offered to this question. For example, it was suggested that one may love others for the sake of God and love God more than all others. St. Francis de Sales proposed that we should love God who loves others. Ignatius Loyola asked to love others finding God in them. All these responses suggest the struggle to accommodate deep human love with love of God. What could be a viable proposal in this regard? Love others with the same love with which God loves others. This is eros; simultaneously it is agape. Love of God and love of human beings are not mutually exclusive. In order to love God with one's heart and soul, one need not kill the emotional warmth in love of neighbor.

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49 John Chrysostom, *Homily III on Marriage*, as cited in Paul Evdokimov, *The Sacrament of Love*, 68.

Erotic Love in Song of Songs: Placing it in the Context of Old Testament Theology

Davis Thekkekara

Song of Songs of the Old Testament brims with erotic language and imageries. Rabi Akiba, in the first or second century after Christ, extols this work saying, “the entire universe is not as worthy as the day on which the Song of Songs was given to Israel, for all the writings are holy, but the Song of Songs is the Holy of the Holies.” There has been a tradition of allegorical interpretation which simply obliterated the erotic from the meaning and content of this book belonging to the Wisdom literature. Modern scholars tend to explain this poem literally and expose the beauty and sanctity of erotic love. This essay means to highlight erotic love expressed in Song of Songs and explain how such love would make a remarkable theological tenet of the Old Testament. Dr. Davis Thekkekara, the author of this essay, teaches biblical theology at Marymatha Major Seminary, Trichur.

The book of Song of Songs is filled with the poetry of physical love, erotic word imageries, and expressions of unbridled emotions. As W. Breuggemann puts it, “The book is a love poetry of an unrestrained, passionate kind in which the erotic interaction of a man and a woman are brought to daring and imaginative speech”.¹ Because of the sexual descriptions and erotic language, Song of Songs often is considered as one of the most scandalous books for both Jewish and Christian faithful. Therefore both Jewish and Christian sages showed their disagreement in accepting it into the biblical canon and the theology. The Salomonic authorship and its allegorical interpretation

1 W. BREUGGEMANN, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon and Christian Imagination*, (Louisville-Kentucky, 2003) 324.

that elevated 'love' expressed in Song of Songs as 'divine love', made basic reason for its entry into the group of inspired books. The thrust of the modern scholars has been to explain this poem literally and uphold the beauty and sanctity of erotic love. This article means to highlight this aspect of love expressed in the book of Song of Songs and consider how such love would make a remarkable theological tenet of the Old Testament.

I. Love Terminologies in Song of Songs

Three third of the book of Song of Songs contain terminologies, images and expressions of love. The key terminologies are *bha* and *dwd*. The verbal form of *bha* is seen 140 times and 61 its various related forms in the Old Testament.² It is used to express a variety of love relationship including both the divine and human love.³ *bha* is used to indicate the relationship of Yahweh and His people (Deut 10, 12; 11, 13, 22; 19, 9; 30, 6; Josh 22, 5; 23, 11; Jer 2, 2). God commands man to love Him (Deut 6, 5), and to show obedience to His commandments (Ps 116, 1; Ps 145, 20). Equally, God also loves men, especially his people Israel (Deut 4, 37; Is 43, 4; Mal 1, 2). It speaks of the family and friendly relationship like, father and son (Gen 22, 2; 25, 28; 37, 3; Prov 13, 24), mother and child (Gen 25, 28), daughter in law and mother in law (Ruth 4, 15), Saul and David (1 Sam 16, 21), Jonathan and David (18, 1-3), teacher and student (Prov 9, 8), servant and master (Ex 21, 5). At the same time, *bha* states an overwhelming

2 The semantic difference between *evroj* and *avga,ph* is not clear in their LXX usages. The common LXX rendering for Hebrew *bha* is *avga,paw*, which is seen in LXX almost 278 time. Its absolute *avga,ph* is used 19 times among which 11 times are seen in the book of Song of Songs (2 Sam 13, 15; Qoh 9, 1, 6; Song of Songs 2, 4f, 7; 3, 5, 10; 5, 8; 7, 7; 8, 4, 6f; Wis 3, 9; 6, 17; Jer 2, 2). G. WALLIS, "bha", *TDOT* 1, 102. The root *evraw* is used twice in the bible in Est 2, 17 and Prov 7, 18 and never in Song of Songs. The elimination of the root *evraw* in Song of Songs is not a hint for the conclusion that the love explained is something divine. Because the common terminology *avga,ph* itself denotes dimensions of erotic and marital love. G. QUELL- E. STAUFFER, "avga,paw", *TDNT* 1, 21-55. At the same time, it should be noted that Song of Songs is unknown with regard to rather important terminologies of Hebrew *dsx*, and *~xr*. For further discussions see, W.F. LOFTHOUSE, "Hen and Hese in the Old Testament", *ZAW* 51 (1933) 30.

3 32 times this word is used of God's love and 22 times of human love towards God. P.J.J.S. ELs, "bha", *NIDOTE*, 281

force of passion between men and woman.⁴ It is used to express the affection and love of the opposite sex, such as the love of Isaac and Rebecca (Gen 24, 67), Jacob and Rachael (Gen 29, 18-30), Leah and Jacob (Gen 29, 32), Shechem and Dinah (Gen 34, 3), Samson and Delilah (Jud 16, 4-15), Michal and David (1 Sam 18, 20). It even speaks of conjugal intercourse (Hos 3, 1; Prov 5, 8; Qoh 9, 9). In Song of Songs *bha* is seen 16 times and receives primarily a meaning of passionate love of man and woman.

Another important love-terminology is *dwd*, which appears almost 40 times in the Old Testament (37 times in singular and three times in plural). It denotes the family relationships meaning 'uncle', (Lev 10, 4; 1 Sam 10, 14; Jer 32, 7), aunt (Lev 18, 14), cousin (Lev 25, 49). It also means 'beloved' or 'darling' in an erotic sense.⁵ The plural of *~ydwd* always means 'love' (Song of Songs 4, 10; 5, 1), specifically the physical sexual relationship (Ez 16, 8; 23, 17; Prov 7, 18).⁶ Song of Songs presents strikingly frequent occurrences of this term i.e., 24 times in eight chapters. The consistent usage of this term in Song of Songs is in its singular providing strong appeal of erotic feelings. It always appear with suffixes such as 'my beloved' (1, 13.16; 2, 3.8.16; 4, 16; 5, 2.4.8.10.16; 6, 2; 7, 12.14; 8, 14), 'your beloved' (5, 9), 'her beloved', (6, 1; 8, 5). There are also many other terms that are used to express the love relationship in Song of Songs like 'companion or friend' (*h[r* 1, 9.15; 2, 2.10.13; 4, 1.7; 5, 2; 6, 4), 'bride' (*hlk* 4, 8.9.10.11.12), 'my sister' (*ytxa* 4, 12).

Man and Woman

Song of Songs portrays the solemn celebration of masculinity and femininity of love. Man and woman praise each other. They enjoy the perfect freedom and total independence in admiring each other. We do not find in the Songs a man who exerts superiority and authority nor a woman who is selfish and disobedient. Both feel, thirst and search for the other. There is no complaint, no murmuring, and no moaning. We find a perfect harmony of heterosexual love and beauty.

4 W. ECHRODT, *Theology of the Old Testament* I, (Tr. J.A. BAKER) (The Old Testament Literature; Philadelphia, 1961) 250.

5 J. SANMARTIN-ASCASO, "dwd", *TDOT* III, 150

6 J. SANMARTIN - ASCASO, "dwd", 151.

Song of Songs is not concerned with the social situations of man and woman, because the author believes that the pure love is beyond all such boundaries and classifications. The family relationships seen in Song of Songs are ambiguous and a father figure is totally absent in the poem. Mother, brothers, chorus and Jerusalem daughters stand as symbols to instigate and encourage the mutual love between man and woman. Song of Songs makes a festivity of human emotions. The expressions of joy (2,3; 5,4; 7,6; 8,6; 1,4b), of suffering and distress (1,5-6; 5,7), of love (2,5; 4,9; 7,9) of confidence (8,6), of sex (1,2; 4,11; 5,4-6) lead the reader into an unassuming world of emotions. The emotions and excitements are mature and noble. These emotions are not sinful lust but natural expressions where a human person is ultimately communicated.

Man and the Nature

The sober dance of this heterosexual love takes place on the stage of the Nature, echoing the paradise account of the book of Genesis. The flowers like, lily, (2,1.2); henna (1,14; 4,13), rose (2,1); the fruits like grapes (7,12), fig (2,3), pomegranate (4,3; 6,7), mandrakes (7,13); the trees like, cedar (1,17; 8,9), orchard (4,13; 6,11), palm (7,7-8) apple (2,3; 8,5), fig (2,3), pomegranate (4,3; 6,7), form the gorgeous garden of Song of Songs. The animals both wild and domestic such as lion (4,8), fox (2,15), goats (4,1; 6,5), stag (2,9), ewe (4,2; 6,6), dove (2,14), gazelle (2,9), leopard (4,8), raven (5,11) create the perfect co-habitation of man and woman in Nature. In fact, in this harmony the love revealed in Song of Songs is elevated itself into a majestic and divine realm. The love of man and woman cannot be appreciated without their fruitful co-existence with the garden (4,12.15; 5,1; 6,2), the valleys (6,11), the mountains (4,8; 8,14), the hills (2,8), the clefts (2,14), and the springs (5,12). The Nature is painted not only as a rich background of human love but also as figures that express innumerable sensations of love. The descriptions like, 'young stag leaps', 'bounding', and 'breaths in speed' (2,9.17; 8,14); 'the bag of myrrh, that lies between her breasts' (1,13), 'the hands, fingers and latches of the door, dripped with myrrh' (5,5), 'a garden locked and fountain sealed is the woman' (4,12); 'your shoots are an orchard of pomegranate' (4,13), are originated in a milieu emotionally charged with eroticism.

Human Body and the Nature

When on its first level, the naked body of man and woman are part of the Nature, towards the second level, the whole Nature is depicted as human body. We can see four poems (*wasfs*)⁷ on the naked human body that are compared to various entities of the Nature. Among these *wasfs* three are of female body (4,1-15; 6,4-7; 7,1-9) and one is of male body (5,10-16). The proportions of human body and sentimental comparisons in the descriptions like, 'the lips are like a strand of scarlet', 'the eyes are like dove', 'the hair is like flock of goats', 'the neck is an ivory tower', 'the two breasts are like twins of a gazelle', 'the navel is a rounded goblet of blended beverage', 'the waist is a heap of wheat', 'the curves of your thighs are like jewels', would naturally surprise the reader. The glowing descriptions of the body parts of young lady create magnificent images of the life of Eden. The man and woman eulogize each other the charms of their nude bodies. As they live in the beauty and variety of Nature, they find the holiness and sanctity of Nature in their body. The imageries like, "Awake, O north wind, and come, O south! Blow upon my garden, that its spices may flow out. Let my beloved come to his garden And eat its pleasant fruits" (4,16); "I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or the hinds of the field, that you stir not up nor awaken love until it pleases. What is that coming up from the wilderness, like a column of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all the fragrant powders of the merchant?" (3, 5-6), give to the whole atmosphere a new spirit of emotions and rich vitality. Both the human body and Nature become pure objects of perfect adoration. The man and woman see the sanctity and cuteness of Nature in each other's naked bodies and their words become the celebrative litany of shameless love and beauty.

Sexuality, Nakedness and Sacredness

The love explained in Song of Songs is not given abstract concepts and odd principles. It is a love that is to be expressed and experienced in one's existence. This love should lead man and woman into perfect

7 It means 'description' in Arabic and denotes the illustrations of the various parts of the human body. Such literary pieces are widely seen in Ancient Near Eastern poetry.

union and reach the final goal of orgasm. It is in this background, the descriptions of the anatomy of naked human body and nature often receive the sacredness of eroticism and the innocence of sexuality. The following word imageries highlight this point,

"Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth — For your love is better than wine" (1,2).

"His left hand is under my head, And his right hand embraces me" (2,6).

"Your lips distil nectar, my bride; honey and milk are under your tongue; the scent of your garments is like the scent of Lebanon. A garden locked is my sister, my bride, a garden locked, a fountain sealed. Your shoots are an orchard of pomegranates with all choicest fruits, henna with nard" (4,11-13).

"I had put off my garment, how could I put it on? I had bathed my feet, how could I soil them? My beloved put his hand to the latch, and my heart was thrilled within me. I arose to open to my beloved, and my hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with liquid myrrh, upon the handles of the bolt" (5,3-5).

"This stature of yours is like a palm tree, And your breasts *like* its clusters. I said, 'I will go up to the palm tree, I will take hold of its branches'. Let now your breasts be like clusters of the vine, The fragrance of your breath is like apples" (7,7-8).

Man and woman expose their nakedness as a sign of their perfect covenantal relationship. This covenantal dimension is expressed in the verse, "Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm" (8,6). This statement should be interpreted in the context of Deuteronomy 6,6-9, where Moses instructs the people of Israel to keep the commandment in their heart and to bind them as a sign on their hands. Nakedness is sacred, only with the covenant. Therefore, Song of Songs is strictly opposite to all kinds of sexual aberrations and deviations since they are against the sacred covenant (marital bond).⁸ The breaking of the covenant between man and woman turns the naked body into a sum of flesh and an object of prurient thoughts. It creates in the spectators an abased lust of emotions and perversions.

8 This verse (8, 6) is compared to the Genesis' language of becoming 'one flesh' (Gen 2, 24). R.W. JENSON. *Song of Songs*. (Interpretation; Louisville, 1989) 90.

Its other aspect also is the ideal of Song of Songs that it is only in the covenant the nakedness becomes holy and sacred.

Love: A Pilgrimage to Consummation

True love is never static. Songs of Songs presents a world of movements. The reiterated invocations and invitations like, 'draw me after you', 'let us make haste' (1,4), 'Arise, my love' (2,10), 'Awake, O north wind', 'come, O south wind! Blow' (4,16), 'Hark!' (5,2), 'Return, return' (6,13), 'let us go out' (7,12) propose warmth and deliberation of love's decision for a definite journey to its final union. The love visualized in Song of Songs is in a continued and repeated search. It is a journey towards consummation. The perennial pilgrimage of love to its consummation realizes the experiences of 'searching and inviting' (1,4; 2,7; 3,5; 8,4.14), the young man calls his maiden (2,10); they come together in the garden (4,12); they eat the choicest fruits (4,16; 3,4; 5,1-2); they gather the lilies (2,1; 4,5; 6,2; 7,3). At the same time, the pilgrimage of love experiences the pain of missing, losing and hiding (5,2-6; 5,7). The journey moves forward with repeated searching (6,1; 6,11; 6,13; 7,10-11) and finding and final budge towards union (8,3; 8,12), where jealousy (wickedness) has no place in the world (8,6).

Song of Songs never sings the song of unnatural love and sinful sexual imaginations. The young man and maiden have genuine, pure, and passionate sexual appeal in their relationship. Song of Songs elevates the heterosexual love into the sanctity of sacrament and the real eroticism is praised and placed as the part and parcel of love experience.⁹ When such love becomes selfish, eroticism turns to be aberrations and perversions. It is at this moment the theme of love takes a new horizon of divine nature in Song of Songs. It is expressed and experienced in mutual commitment and total dedication.¹⁰

9 J. C. EXUM, *Song of Songs*, (The Old Testament Library; Louisville, 2005) 23.

10 The search for an allegory with regard to this romantic poetry perhaps created a sharp contrast between Divine and human love in traditional Jewish and Christian spirituality. These two attributions to the basic notion of love made the understanding that human love as something negative and divine love as something positive. This distinction was further sharpened interpreting the human love as something that is related to the human body and sexual life and divine love as something beyond it. Such distinction in opposite terminologies is non-biblical and unchristian. See the discussion. Pope BENEDICT XVI, *Deus Caritas Est (God is Love)*, § 4-6.

II. Placing Song of Songs in the Old Testament Theology

It is to be asked how such type of love envisaged in Song of Songs could be accepted as a commendable biblical motive, found in the main stream of Old Testament theology. It will also serve as the overarching link to explain the fundamental relationship of wisdom literature with the rest of the world of biblical theology. The fundamental theology of wisdom literature is proposed as creation theology.¹¹ J. Barr calls it as 'the natural theology'.¹² Wisdom literature presents how 'the natural man thinks and wishes God what to be'.¹³ Wisdom sages show particular interest in everyday problems of ordinary people and it is not bothered much about the people of God in its fundamental obligation to the covenant.¹⁴ In the natural theology and very particularly in wisdom literature human being and his/her relationship with God who created the universe form the focus of attention. Furthermore, the basic tendency of both natural theology and the wisdom literature is to present human being in all of his/her emotions, weaknesses, anguishes and actualities.

Among such existential situations and emotional yearnings, sexual or erotic dimension of love forms an inner thread, which passes through wisdom literary corpus to the Old Testament theology. The emotional nature of such love is seen not only in Song of Songs but also in other wisdom books. The seductive language of the foolish woman, "I have decked my couch with coverings, coloured spreads of Egyptian linen"; "I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon"; "Come, let us take our fill of love till morning; let us delight ourselves with love" (7,16-18), presented in the book of proverbs very often makes similar mood of eroticism found in Song of Songs. The advice for devoted marital life is "Drink water from

11 W. ZIMMERLI, "The Place and Limit of the Wisdom in the Framework of the Old Testament Theology", *SJT* 17 (1964) 146-158 = *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom: Selected, with Prolegomenon*, by J.L. CRENSHAW, (N.Y., 1976) 314-326.

12 J. BARR, *The Concept of Biblical Theology: An Old Testament Perspective* 476

13 J. BARR, *Biblical Faith and Natural Theology*, (Oxford, 1993) 93

14 H.D. PREUSS, *Old Testament Theology II*, (The Old Testament Library; Louisville, 1991) 203.

your own cistern, flowing water from your own well. Should your springs be scattered abroad, streams of water in the streets? Let them be for yourself alone, and not for strangers with you. Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth (Prov 5, 15-18), spreads the perfume of erotic sensations.

Entering into other biblical accounts, the first creation account of the bible itself would produce the examples of love of man and woman. The creation of man is presented in pair as male and female (Gen 1, 27; 2, 18) and man's existence in two sexual entities shows that God willed it from the beginning.¹⁵ The remarkable statement of sexual union is expressed in the statement, "a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh" (Gen 2, 24). The history of king Solomon--the central historical figure of the Israelitic wisdom tradition-- is presented as the one who possessed seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines (1Kings 11,3; Qoh 2,7-8). Such illustrations suggest sexual prowess of King Solomon and thereby he becomes the paragon of love in the whole Old Testament history.

The prophetic symbolism often explains the relationship between Yahweh and Israel as a bond of conjugal love. It is presented with erotic flavour. One is drawn to the prophetic images of Yahweh as a lover who woos Israel and becomes Israel's husband as in Hosea 1-3 and Jeremiah 2-3 or in erotic twists in Ezekiel 16 and 23. A number of narrations are seen in the linguistic style of prophet Ezekiel, where eroticism becomes key motive of love relationship between God and Israel. Some examples would help us at this point: "And you grew up and became tall and arrived at full maidenhood; your breasts were formed, and your hair had grown; yet you were naked and bare. When I passed by you again and looked upon you, behold, you were at the age for love; and I spread my skirt over you, and covered your nakedness" (Ez 7-8); "Son of man, there were two women, the daughters of one mother; they played the harlot in Egypt; they played the harlot in their youth; there their breasts were pressed and their virgin bosoms handled" (Ez 23,3); "Thus she flaunted her whoring, exposing her body, until I withdrew my affection from her as I had

15 K. LUKE, *The Cultural Background of the Old Testament*, (Malleswaram, 2002) 93.

withdrawn it from her sister. But she began whoring worse than ever, remembering her girlhood, when she had played the whore in Egypt, when she had been in love with their profligates, big-membered as donkeys, ejaculating as violently as stallions. You were hankering for the debauchery of your girlhood, when they used to handle your nipples in Egypt and fondle your young breasts (Ez 23, 18-21). "They played the harlot in Egypt; they played the harlot in their youth; there their breasts were pressed and their virgin bosoms handled" (Ez 23, 2-3). The above illustrations are intense prophetic words with strong sexual or erotic imageries to explain the passion and love of Yahweh to Israel.

The characteristics of Yahweh as being in love with His girlfriend Israel is described under the well-known literary figure of vineyard. "Let me sing for my beloved a love song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill" (5, 1).¹⁶ The theme of 'bride-bridegroom' is a prevalent motive in the Old Testament that could be paralleled to the love aspect of Song of Songs. This is seen in the following texts, "I will bring all the people back to you as a bride comes home to her husband. You seek the life of only one man, and all the people will be at peace" (2Sam 17, 3); "Lift up your eyes round about and see; they all gather, they come to you. As I live, says the Lord, you shall put them all on as an ornament, you shall bind them on as a bride does (Is 49, 18); "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels (Is 61, 10); "For as a young man marries a virgin, so shall your sons marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride so shall your God rejoice over you" (62, 5). "Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem, Thus says the Lord, I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown" (Jer 2, 2); "And I will make to cease from the cities of Judah and from the streets of Jerusalem the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride; for the land shall become a waste (Jer 7, 34).¹⁷

16 Outside Song of Songs the word *ydw* appears only in Is 5, 1, where it means beloved in its fullest sense. J. SANMARTIN-ASCASO, "bha", 152

17 further motives of bride and bridegroom. Is 57, 8; Jer 16, 9; 25, 10; 33, 11;

"I loved her and sought her from my youth, and I desired to take her for my bride, and I became enamoured of her beauty" (Wis 8, 2). The warmth and joy of mutual love and care found in the bride-bridegroom motive is seen in Song of Songs in its full length.

Hosea's attempt to present Yahweh's relationship to his people under the imagery of his own marriage is shocking and scandalous. How provocative was Hosea to manifest the love of God with the comparison of perverted marital relationships? Yahweh commands Hosea to marry a harlot and to love the wife who went after another man. The wide range of passions of God for Israel is the unique dialectic of the concept of love illustrated in whole complex of the history of Israel. Prophet Hosea shows that the word of God is never reserved to present such craving of Yahweh to His people under conjugal and erotic symbols.

Songs of Songs, the classic of the biblical romantic poetries is an indispensable literature of the Old Testament where erotic love is praised to its maximum and provides "a theology of human sexuality".¹⁸ It would be apt to conclude these reflections with the words of N. Ayo, "The erotic quality of the love depicted is always reverent and respectful of the dignity of the beloved. It never descends to the objectification of the body... Although, it is the straightforward and unabashed celebration of the human body, Song remains modest and persistent in its awareness that to reveal less is to reveal more".¹⁹

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18 R.E. MURPHY, *The Song of Songs: A Commentary on the Book of Canticles*, (Minneapolis, 1990) 101.

19 N. AYO, *Sacred Marriage: The Wisdom of Song of Songs*, (N.Y., 1997) 19.

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